COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. 785.

MISS CAREW BY AMELIA B. EDWARDS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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BY

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AUTHOR OF "BARBARA'S HISTORY," ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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MISS CAREW.

CHAPTER I.

Introduction.

I WAS in love — hopelessly, helplessly, irrationally in love — with Miss Carew.

Hopelessly, of course. How could it be otherwise? I had met her at one or two dinner-parties — I had danced with her at one or two balls — I had bowed to her half a dozen times in the Park. It was the merest acquaintanceship, and nothing more. Had it even been more, what was I, Philip Dundonald, that I should aspire, even in my wildest dreams, to the rich, the beautiful, the brilliant Miss Carew? I might as reasonably have allowed myself to become enamoured of the Venus Milo, or the Madonna della Seggiola.

I was only Philip Dundonald, barrister-at-law; and I had never held a brief in my life. I was the author of an unsuccessful book — of a transpontine drama, the parentage of which I was ashamed to acknowledge — and of a chaos of leaders, light articles, and sensation stories; mere bubbles carried down upon the ever-flowing current of some half-dozen daily and weekly publications. I was as poor

as Romeo's apothecary. Miss Carew was a great heiress. My life was spent in the solution of that curious philosophical experiment by which brains are transmuted into bread. For Miss Carew the world was a huge cake, out of which she picked only the plums. I rented a dingy first-floor overlooking a dusty little organ-haunted square in the heart of that unknown region lying between Pentonville and the British Museum. Miss Carew owned a house in Saville Row, an abbey in Yorkshire, and a villa near Florence. In short, I was as far removed from the sphere in which she lived and had her being, as if I had been an inhabitant of Uranus.

Nevertheless, I loved her. I loved her from the first moment I beheld her; and that was at an evening-party in Mayfair, at precisely twenty-four minutes past ten o'clock on Thursday evening, the twenty-fourth of December, eighteen hundred and sixty-two. I repaired to the party in full possession of all my faculties. I left it a hopeless lunatic, and went to bed that night in my boots.

Thenceforth the universe for me contained only Miss Carew. I dreamt of her; raved of her; wrote sonnets to her; plunged wildly into evening parties, in the hope of meeting her; wore gloves two sizes too small for my hands, and boots that I blush to look back upon; and bored my best friend, Bob Conyers, to such an inhuman degree, that he fled me at the end of three weeks, and finished the winter in Florence.

Nor was this all. I hired a high-stepping horse, and distinguished myself in the Park on Sundays.

I accepted the theatrical business of the *Pimlico Patriot*, on the bare chance of sometimes seeing my divinity in the stalls; and, having committed every other absurdity of which youth is capable, I crowned the whole by collecting my miscellaneous stories into three showy volumes, and publishing them anonymously, with the following enigmatical dedication:

"*To Miss* * * * * *

"MADAM,

If I dared, I would lay these volumes at your feet, and entreat your gracious permission to ennoble them with your name; but, wanting the courage to address you, I venture only to do with them what I have already done with my heart, myself, and the few talents heaven has bestowed on me — dedicate them to you in silent homage, and suffer them to float down the stream of time as safely, or perilously, as chance may ordain.

"I am, Madam,

"Your most devoted servant,

"— —."

But they were not destined to float down the Stream of Time under any circumstances. They went to the bottom like lead, and were no more seen.

The tales themselves were slight enough, and light enough, to have drifted through the libraries as safely as other straws; and perhaps would have done so, if I had not sent them into the world with a declaration on the title-page. But the reviewers

pounced upon my luckless dedication, and made such savage fun of me that the public laughed and passed on — and all because I could not help adoring Miss Carew.

I do not think I was much affected by this ill-fortune. My joys and sorrows were all "lodged beyond the reach of fate," in Cloudland, at that time; but I sent a copy of the work (gorgeously bound in white morocco, and addressed in a feigned hand) to Miss Carew, and derived an idiotic satisfaction from the thought that she had perhaps read my stories, and even wondered, not unkindly, who the unknown author might be.

I look back upon the whole of that season as through a mist. I am dimly conscious that I ought not to have been at large. I remember days when I was preposterously happy, and days when I was preposterously miserable. I am haunted by the humiliating recollection of how my landlady surprised me in tears one morning over a dish of devilled kidneys. The kidneys that winter were always blacked, and my boots never. An unlimited duty was levied on my wine and tea; and the cat, with a perverted appetite to which the evidence of Natural History offers no parallel, stole several bundles of my best cigars. Mrs. Mozley knew my secret. I have not the slightest doubt that she read me as easily as she read my newspapers, my letters, and the rest of my private papers. I was in an abject state, and she treated me as she pleased. What were boots, or kidneys, or choice Havannahs, to a soul given over to the contemplation of Miss Carew?

Thus the winter wore by, and the spring; and the trees in the little square that had looked so green for about a fortnight, were brown and dusty with the summer drought. And still I did penance in the park, and immolated myself at the theatres, and was rewarded at long intervals by a distant bow, or a polite smile from Miss Carew. If I caught but a passing glimpse of her once in each long week, I was consoled. If I met her at an evening party — if I danced in the same quadrille with her — I was happy for a month. Once — only once — I was so blest as to hand her down to supper; and went home, like Paul Flemming, with a halo round my head.

Suddenly, in the middle of June, when the season was at its height, and the weather at its brightest, the sun went out in the heavens, and London became a howling wilderness.

The *Court Journal* announced the departure of Miss Carew for her seat in Yorkshire.

I sent in my resignation to the editor of the *Pimlico Patriot* by the next post, and gave myself up to despair. I told myself that I had done with life. I shaved no more. I wore slippers, scorned cravats, and grew reckless about my hands. I was a misanthrope — a recluse — a hater of my species. I became the terror of all the little boys about the square; and I derived a gloomy satisfaction from the perusal of "Taylor on Poisons."

This crisis had lasted about a week, when Sir Geoffrey Buchanan called upon me.

Sir Geoffrey Buchanan is one of the best men that breathe the good north country air; hearty,

joyous, hospitable, boisterous, good-humoured, good-looking, weighs fifteen stone, and stands six feet three without his shoes. He is about forty-five years of age, and owns large estates in Durham and Northumberland. About eight years ago, he married a pretty, penniless French governess, who makes him perfectly happy. His ruling hobby is mechanics. With a keen taste for field sports — with a kennel full of hounds, a stable full of hunters, and one of the most perfect yachts that ever flitted over the face of the waters, Geoffrey Buchanan's first and foremost delight is in his workshop. The inventor is born, not made; and Geoffrey is a born inventor. He is gifted with that inconvenient ingenuity that is perpetually on the alert to improve everything. His house is a museum of experimental mechanics; but his inventions, I am bound to confess, seldom answer the precise purpose for which they are intended. Too frequently, indeed, they do something that nobody expects from them, and which is highly disagreeable when done. He invented a warming apparatus, for instance, that blew up four of his green-houses; a mowing machine that nearly cut his own legs off; and a baby-jumper that all but strangled his eldest-born at the tender age of eleven months. He says of himself that he has achieved more splendid failures than any man of science upon record; but then no amount of failure discourages him. No sooner has one invention turned out badly, than he begins another, still more complicated, still more impracticable, and based, of course, like the last, on the soundest principles. Dear old Geoffrey

Buchanan! Everyone laughed at him, and everyone loved him; and I believe I did less of the first, and more of the last, than most people. Yet I cannot say that I was in the least delighted to hear his hearty voice at my door that dusty, sunny, dismal morning in June, as I sat, obstinately melancholy, in my little first-floor lodging, bewailing my blighted hopes, and Miss Carew.

I had instructed Mrs. Mozley to deny me to all comers; but Sir Geoffrey Buchanan insisted on being admitted.

"Engaged?" I heard him say. "What do you mean by engaged, ma'am? Is he at home, and alone?"

"Mr. Dundonald is at home, sir, and alone, sir," replied my landlady, apologetically; "but it's his particular orders . . ."

"Particular fiddlesticks!" interrupted Buchanan. "I've had trouble enough to find this confounded house, and I'm not going away now without seeing him. There — you needn't announce me, ma'am. I'll make it all right, and take the blame myself. First floor, did you say? Thank you."

And then came his heavy step on the stairs, his jovial face at the door, and a mighty, outstretched hand, that gripped mine till it ached again.

"Here's a pretty fellow!" exclaimed he. "Here's a fellow that refuses to see his friends, and keeps a female griffin to tell them he's engaged. Engaged indeed! If you were not only engaged, but married, Phil Dundonald — married six times over, like Bluebeard — I'd see you, by Jove!"

"Confound it, Buchanan," I said peevishly, "you needn't crush one's hand to a jelly! Your grasp is like a vice."

"Like a vice, my dear fellow? Not a bit of it. Like a virtue — like all the virtues, Christian and Pagan! And now tell me why you shut yourself up in this way. Are you working too hard at this deuced book-making trade? — eh? Spinning stories of love and madness? Dealing out battle, murder, and sudden death at so much per column? It won't do, you know. It won't pay. The machinery of the brain is of a mighty cunning and delicate adjustment, young man, and not easily repaired when out of order."

"I'm not working particularly hard just now," I replied.

"You're not ill, boy?"

"Oh, no — only a little fagged. One gets fagged towards the close of the season."

"Not ill, and not hard at work," said Sir Geoffrey, doubtfully. "Then, to return to my original question — Why do you shut yourself up?"

"Because I'm unsociable."

"And why are you unsociable, Phil?"

"Why do you cross-examine me, as if I were in a witness-box?" I exclaimed, impatiently. "How can I tell why I am unsociable, unless it is because I am sulky — disagreeable — out of sorts — and fit company for no one but myself?"

Buchanan went over to the windows, drew up both the blinds to the very top, and then, taking

me by the shoulders as if I were a child, turned my face to the light and stared at me deliberately.

"You are not well," said he. "You are pale, nervous, irritable — you must let me prescribe for you."

"Nonsense, Buchanan. I am all right."

"On the contrary, you are all wrong. Now look here, my fine fellow — here's a little prescription that I always carry about with me; and as you know the particulars of your own complaint better than I do, all you have to do is just to fill in the figures, and get the physic made up as soon as possible."

Saying which, he took a blank cheque from his pocket-book, and laid it before me on the table.

I put the paper back into his hand.

"Upon my life, Buchanan," I said, hurriedly, "you are altogether mistaken. I feel your kindness as much as if I accepted it; but I am as free from difficulty as yourself. I have more than I need; and I owe no man a farthing."

With a troubled look upon his honest face, he replaced the cheque in his pocket-book.

"Well," he said, "if you won't speak, I can't make you; but I'm confident there's something wrong — and I know I could do something to put matters straight, if you'd only give me the chance. However, that's not what I came here to say. I've only been in London two days, and I go home to-night; but I was determined not to leave the place without seeing you. I want you to come down to Seaborough Court the week after next."

"Thank you," I replied; "but . . . ."

"It will do you all the good in the world, man — let a little fresh air in upon your imagination, and clean the windows in your brain."

"But I cannot spare the time at present," I replied.

"You said just now you were not particularly busy!"

"If I am not, I ought to be. My publisher is really urgent, just now, about a little book that ought to be in the press, and . . ."

"Fiddlesticks! We'll give you a den to scribble in, if scribble you must."

"Upon my word, Buchanan . . . ."

"Upon my last will and testament, Dundonald, I daren't go home without your promise. My wife told me to take no refusal, and, by Jove, sir, you must and shall come."

"Lady Buchanan is a great deal too kind," I said; "but it will be far pleasanter and more convenient to me to run down to Durham later in the year."

"It won't be half so pleasant," persisted my friend. "Later in the year we shall perhaps be alone; and you know, my dear boy, we're not amusing people ourselves. We're well enough in our way; but it's a common-place, humdrum way. If you come now, you'll meet a nice little party. There'll be our lively neighbour, the Honourable Mrs. Macpherson . . ."

"A detestable woman — like a comb, all back and teeth."

"And Brewer — you remember Brewer of the 18th Light Dragoons?"

"There are few people whom I would forget with greater pleasure. Captain Brewer unites the profligacy of Whitehall to the dullness of Buckingham Palace; and I hate anachronisms."

"Well, then, there's Lord Sherbrooke — you won't deny that he's worth meeting; or that he's a thoroughly sensible, well-informed, cultivated man?"

"Lord Sherbrooke is the greatest bore I know. He is not a man at all — he is simply a work of compilation. His mind is as ill-dressed as his body, and his opinions, like his clothes, have something incongruous about them, as if they belonged to somebody else. And so they do. He hasn't a thought that is not second-hand; and he steals from the dead as shamelessly as he steals from the living. Talk to him about art, and he spouts Ruskin — about theology, and he gives you a dilution of Colenso — about politics, and he garbles last night's debate. If he ventures on a witticism, it is Sydney Smith's; and when he grows sentimental over the third bottle of port, he drenches you with Moore and Byron. No, my dear fellow, you cannot tempt me with Lord Sherbrooke."

"So it seems," said Geoffrey, half-laughing, half-vexed. "What a bitter temper you're in, man! What's the matter with you?"

"The deuce knows," I replied, fretfully. "I told you I was fit company for no one but myself; and you see I was right."

"I see that you are bent on making the worst

of yourself, and staying at home," said Buchanan, taking up his gloves, and preparing to be gone. "I'm heartily sorry for it."

"And I am sorry to say 'No' so often — I am, indeed. But I shall enjoy Seaborough Court twice as much when you are alone."

"By-the-by, I didn't tell you all the names, either. Clement Stone is coming."

"The Rector of Broadmere? I remember him. A very pleasant, gentlemanly fellow."

"That he is, Phil — a capital fellow. And Miss Carew."

I could not believe my ears.

"*And who?*" I asked, faintly.

"Miss Carew — Miss Carew of Wandesborough Abbey. I'm surprised, Phil, that you don't know Miss Carew."

The sun was shining in the heavens again; the howling wilderness had burst into blossom; the world was a garden of Eden; and I had not done with life, after all!

"I — I believe I have met Miss — the lady you mention," I said, indifferently — "in society."

"No doubt — no doubt. She goes everywhere. Any message for Clement Stone?"

He asked me if I had any message for Clement Stone! He had taken me at my word, and he was actually going! In another minute it would be too late. I became desperate.

"My regards, of course," I replied. "My very cordial regards. He is a man whom I like immensely — a man whose religion is of the right, sunny,

genial sort; and who, because he is wise, does not disdain to be witty. I am very sorry not to meet him."

"He will be very sorry too," said that obtuse Geoffrey. "He took to you amazingly; and he often speaks of you. Bless my heart! two o'clock already, and I have an appointment in the City at three. Good-bye, my dear fellow — God bless you!"

"I tell you what it is, Buchanan — if you had mentioned Stone's name from the first, I'm not sure that I should have been so obstinate in my refusal," said I, in a burst of candour.

It was a consummate piece of hypocrisy and I cannot remember it to this day without a blush; but it was my last, and only sure card — and I played it.

Sir Geoffrey Buchanan opened his blue eyes, and lifted up his great voice in a joyous laugh that might have been heard across the square.

"In the name of all the Gods, then," said he, "why don't you change your mind?"

"Because — because you'll think me such a fool, if I do."

"Then upon my life, Phil, I shall think it the only redeeming piece of sense that you've perpetrated to-day. Come, is it settled, and may we expect you next Monday week?"

"Well — I think you may; wind and weather permitting."

"Listen to him! What have you, a landsman, to do with wind and weather, I should like to know? By-the-by, I've made a most remarkable improvement

in my yacht — really an extraordinary improvement, Phil."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"An arrangement of wheels and pulleys, by which all the ropes can be worked by one man — that man sitting quietly to his work in a little deck-cabin built up amidships for the purpose. I can't explain it to you without the diagrams; but I assure you it's the most remarkable improvement of the age."

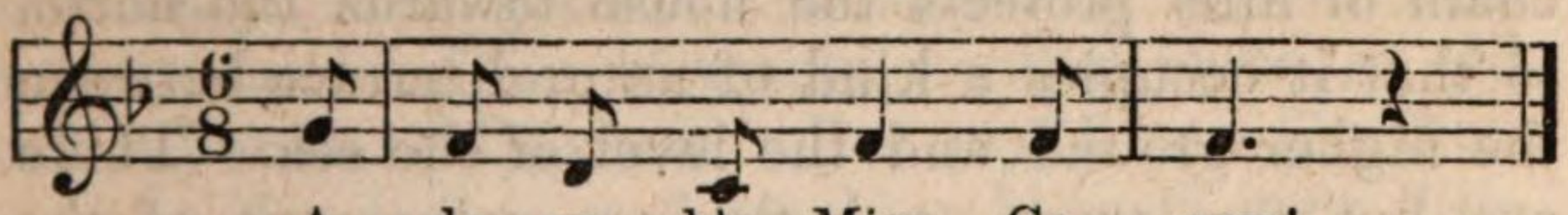
"You're as bad, Buchanan," said I, laughingly, "as Monsieur Auguste Comte, who thinks he could improve the solar system. What will you attempt to improve next?"

"Your manners, Phil!" he replied, with another great laugh. "Your manners. But I mean to patent my invention, sir — ay, and to bring it before the Board of Admiralty, too. But there, it's of no use to talk to an incredulous youngster like you. Good-bye, till Monday week; and beware of that female griffin down-stairs. She's a terrific phenomenon, by Jove! — a cross between Medusa and the Sphinx."

Saying which, he again nearly wrenched my hand off, and went down the stairs, laughing like a Titan.

He had found me in the lowest circle of the *Inferno;* he left me in the *Paradiso.* I was in a blissful dream. I walked upon air; I breathed sunshine; I was pervaded by a sentiment of universal benevolence. I felt that I could have taken Mrs. Mozley in my arms, and invoked benisons upon her; but I abstained from that act of devotion, and presented her, instead, with a bottle of my best brandy.

The chop that I ate that day for my dinner was cut from an Arcadian sheep, and had the flavour of the golden age. My apple-dumpling was made from the golden fruit of the Hesperides. My modest pint of ordinary claret tasted like that "mighty wine" given to Ulysses by Maron the priest of Phœbus. The very organ that droned "the Low-backed Car" under my window, while I discussed my humble banquet, seemed, to my infatuated ear, to repeat a perpetual refrain of



CHAPTER II.

SEABOROUGH COURT stands high, and faces the sea. The waves that roll in so heavily upon the beach with the flow of the tide, ebb back, unbroken by even a rock, to the coast of Denmark. A low chain of hills protects the house towards the north, so that it occupies a kind of natural terrace between the higher ground and the level of the sea. There are but few trees, and the general aspect of the place, facing as it does to the north-east, is somewhat bleak and barren; but the pasture lands beyond the hills are rich and abundant, and the air in summer is delicious. The house itself is an incongruous pile, the oldest portion of which dates back to the Wars of the Roses; but which has been, in the course of centuries, so frequently altered, enlarged, and modernized, that scarcely any of its historical features remain. It is not in the least like those antique mansions that novelists delight to describe. It is not "a dear old place," with ivied turrets, lilied moats, and pannelled drawing-rooms looking out upon ancestral oaks. In it are no dusky corridors, nor tapestried chambers, nor cloistered courtyards. No half-deserted chapel, peopled with the crumbling effigies of bygone knights and dames, nestles in the shadow of its walls. On the contrary, it presents at first sight a thoroughly sub-

stantial, comfortable aspect; is in excellent repair; not in the least picturesque; and, on the side of the principal entrance, bears a strong general resemblance to the College of Surgeons. It is only when one has been round to the back, and grown learned in the ins and outs of Seaborough Court, that its antiquity becomes apparent. An unfamiliar guest might dwell there for weeks without discovering that it was anything but a good modern house; and yet it contains a wing of the time of William and Mary, a magnificent Elizabethan kitchen and buttery, and cellars of massy vaulted stone as old as the battle of Hexham. But my friend Geoffrey is no archæologist, and troubles himself very little about the past glories of his family, his residence, or anything that is his. He is prouder of his old port than of his pedigree; and prouder, perhaps, of a corkscrew of his own invention, than of either. As for his kitchen and cellarage, they are both famous; but their fame is founded on the good things that come out of them, and not upon their mediæval merits — and that is precisely the sort of renown that their owner appreciates.

I went down to Durham on the Monday week, as proposed — that memorable Monday of that memorable first week in July — taking with me dress-gloves enough for Briareus, and dress-boots enough for a centipede. As for perfumery and pomade, I could have oiled and scented a volunteer corps without being perceptibly the poorer. I do not think, by the way, that psychological inquirers have directed such attention as the question deserves, to

that subtle link which connects pomade with the tender passion. It is in the mysterious nature of things that Cupid and Briedenbach should play into one another's hands. A man in love gravitates by an inevitable law towards bear's grease, and takes a morbid interest in his hair. I remember that I derived inexpressible consolation at this time from the purchase of Patent Moelline, Glycerine Oil, Crystalline Cream, Nutritive Pomade, and the like emollient substances. Above all, that I found a soothing influence, such as "divine philosophy" never shed upon the troubled soul of man, in Rowland's Balm of Columbia.

It is not in my power to give any coherent account of the first two or three days at Seaborough Court. They went by, as it were, in an elemental dream of love and jealousy, bliss and despair. I was jealous of Captain Brewer, of Lord Sherbrooke, of the Reverend Clement Stone (who had a wife and seven children in Berkshire) and of even dear, good, hospitable Geoffrey Buchanan himself. I could neither sleep, nor eat, nor talk, as in the days when my heart was free of Miss Carew. I had been used to make some little success in society once upon a time; but now I could not have said a brilliant thing to save my life. I was painfully conscious of my own shy stupidity. I knew that I was duller than Brewer, and that even Lord Sherbrooke's plagiarisms left me in the shade. I burned to distinguish myself. I wished that there might be a great storm, and a vessel wrecked in sight of the house; and pictured to myself how I alone, of any

man upon that coast, would go out with a rope about my waist, and save the fainting sufferers one by one. I wished that Seaborough Court might take fire in the night, and thought how glorious it would be, when the conflagration was at its highest, and the dastard crowd stood aloof, to rush forward through the smoke and flames, and battle my way up the burning staircase, till I found the chamber where Miss Carew stood at the window, appealing in vain for help from those below. Then I would take her in my arms; wrap a blanket round her beloved form, to protect her drapery from the flames; and bear her, staggering, breathless, but undaunted, to a place of safety, where, falling at her feet, all blackened and ghastly, I would say: "I love you, Helen Carew! I never dared to tell you till now," — *and so die.*

But these were wild dreams. The weather was glorious; the sea like a mirror of blue steel; and as for fire, there seemed no more chance of it than if Seaborough Court had been built, like the palace of the O'Donaghue, at the bottom of the Lake of Killarney.

At length there came a morning — I think it was the fourth or fifth after my arrival — when we went out for a long day on the water in Sir Geoffrey's yacht. The party consisted of Mrs. Macpherson, the Reverend Clement Stone, Captain Brewer, Miss Carew, and myself. Buchanan, as captain of his own "tub," took the lead. Lord Sherbrooke, with whom the sea disagreed, remained behind; and

Lady Buchanan preferred to stay at home with her children.

I think I never saw so splendid a morning. We had weighed anchor by eight, and breakfasted on board. Everyone was in the highest spirits. The sea was inconceivably blue, and melted into a golden haze on the horizon. A delicious air breathed from the south, and dimpled the waters now and then, as with a smile. The shore receded by imperceptible degrees; the grey gulls flashed by at intervals between us and the sky; and the yacht glided on with half-filled sails, like a toy ship upon a sheet of ornamental water. We were bound for a romantic little island off the coast of Northumberland, some twenty miles to the north of Seaborough Court, where we were to picnic — a mere speck of an island, said Geoffrey, scarcely a mile and a half in circumference; containing three or four fishermen's cottages, about a dozen inhabitants, one clump of trees, a handful of herbage, and a few sheep. Nobody ever went there. It was entered on no map. It had not even a name. Could anything be more delightful?

On we went, then, laughing, talking, revelling in the sea and the sunshine, and immensely amused by Sir Geoffrey's ingenious invention for the management of his yacht. He was charmed to show it, and explain it, and illustrate it to us, over and over again. He assured us that it was the most useful, the most surprising, the most important improvement that the world had seen for the last quarter of a century. It really did seem very in-

genious. I have not now the slightest conception of what the mechanism was; but I understood it well enough, or fancied I understood it, at the time. All that I remember of it is a kind of framework fixed about half-way down the mainmast, serving, I think, to collect a large number of ropes into a nucleus, whence they were drawn still lower through the roof of an absurd-looking little sentry-box, in the middle of the deck. Inside this sentry-box was a bewildering maze of pulleys, nooses, and knotted rope's ends; and it looked more like a very small and overcrowded belfry than anything else that I could think of.

Thus the first hour or two went by, somewhat lazily on the part of the yacht, but very pleasantly. About half-past ten, the breeze freshened a little, and some three or four tiny clouds, white and fleecy, like a flight of swans, rose out from the golden haze, and drifted across the sky. Then the sails swelled; a joyous ripple sprang up under our bows; and our progress became perceptibly quickened. By eleven, we were cutting through the water at a brilliant rate, scattering a shower of diamonds at every dip of our prow, and leaving a creamy trail in our wake, that widened and vanished as we left it behind. Every little wave by this time had its crest; and the sky was traversed by a long procession of majestic, opalescent clouds, which became every moment statelier and more numerous. Then the wind shifted a point or two, and the yacht began to pitch rather more than was strictly agreeable.

I went up to Geoffrey in the sentry-box, and

found him looking very red and warm, and ringing, as it seemed to me, a frantic peal upon all the imaginary bells at once.

"The yacht pitches confoundedly, my dear fellow," I said. "She doesn't seem so steady on her legs as last year. What's the matter with her?"

"Nothing," replied my friend, clutching desperately at two or three different nooses in succession, as if he wanted to hang himself, and was feeling for the stoutest rope. "Nothing ails the yacht — it's only these pulleys that don't work as they ought. I'm trying to bring her head round a bit, and . . . ."

A tremendous lurch, followed by a little scream from Mrs. Macpherson, interrupted his explanation.

"And in the meanwhile, I presume, we all run a fair chance of going to the bottom?"

"It's the first time I've ever known the system work badly," groaned poor Buchanan.

"System, indeed!" I exclaimed, angrily. "What business have you to endanger your friend's lives with any system under the sun? Confound your system!"

At this moment the entanglement, whatever it might be, yielded to his efforts — the mainsail swung to its proper bearings, and the little vessel, now once more before the wind, sped on as before.

Buchanan drew a deep breath, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Don't say anything about this to the others, Phil," he said, hurriedly. "I'm very sorry — more shocked and sorry than I can tell you. The truth is, the thing does not answer as I had hoped — and

— and our position just now was — was really, for a moment or two, a position of danger."

I looked at the sky and the sea, and the lovely, laughing face of Miss Carew, as she sat talking on the after-deck; and a sudden pang of apprehension shot through me.

"If I am any judge of weather, Geoffrey Buchanan," I said, "we shall have a gale blowing up before three more hours have gone by."

"I know it," he replied.

"You know it? Good heavens, man! what do you mean by saying you know it? What do you propose to do to ensure the safety of your yacht?"

"Look there," said he, pointing straight ahead. "Do you see the island?"

"I see something — a mere point — a scrap of rock scarcely big enough for a seagull to build on."

He smiled and shook his head.

"Don't be too hard upon me, Phil," said he. "Don't make quite the worst of everything. That's the island, and we are within three miles of it. It isn't quite as big as Australia; but it's big enough to afford you all a pleasant resting-place, while I press the fishermen into my service, and set to work to put the yacht trim and ship-shape again, before we start for home. A couple of hours will do it; and as for all this gear, it shall be pitched overboard as soon as we drop anchor — every thread and pulley of it!"

He sighed as he said this, and glanced up re-

gretfully at his invention. Indignant as I had been a few moments before, I felt sorry for him now.

"No, no," I said, "don't do that — don't throw it overboard. Stow it away in the hold; and perhaps when you have leisure to turn the thing over in your mind, you may hit upon some alteration that will make your system available after all!"

He shook his head again.

"I think not," he replied; "I fear not. Pshaw! 'tis only another illusion gone. I am used to reading the burial service over my dreams."

He spoke with a bitterness foreign to his nature. I saw that he was deeply mortified, and even more disappointed than mortified; so I said a cheering word or two and left him — as I felt sure he would prefer to be left — alone.

The little isle was now growing momentarily more distinct, and every glass was levelled at it. Transparent and purplish at first, it changed from purple to grey, from grey to a greenish brown, and presently showed as an irregular whinstone rock, sloping to the sea on the south-east, and rising to the north in a kind of turfy promontory. As we drew nearer, there became visible a little cluster of white cottages near the water's edge — a boat moored in a tiny creek close by — a clump of gaunt trees on a green rise about the very centre of the islet; and a few sheep dotted over the broken upland. To the left, some six or seven miles distant, lay the undulating coast of Northumberland, and the dim outlines of the hills. Far and wide, in every other direction, north-east, east, and south,

stretched the sea. A more utterly barren, unpromising rock, could scarcely be conceived in dull, or stormy weather; but seen thus in the full blaze of a brilliant July sun, with a fresh breeze blowing, and the blue waves chasing each other across the glittering ocean, it looked positively beautiful.

Sir Geoffrey ran the yacht "into port," and cast anchor about half-past eleven. We landed shortly after, to the intense wonder and delight of three women, one old white-haired fisherman, and some six or eight half-wild, sun-browned flaxen-headed children. From these we learned that the two other men (there being but three on the island) were gone over to Tynemouth; that their colony consisted of but three families, and numbered thirteen souls, including six children and one infant in arms; that the two fishermen now absent were the sole support of the whole community, which lived by the produce of their nets; and that the island was assessed as a part of Islandshire, and belonged to the county of Northumberland. These poor colonists, we learned, paid an almost nominal rent for their small tenements, and were exempted, by ancient privilege, from most of the taxes levied elsewhere. They also added to their scanty gains by the preparation of kelp, and the breeding of a few sheep. The children knew of no world beyond that in which they were born; and we found that one of the women had not even been over to the mainland for more than eleven years.

We went into their cottages; one of which served as a little general shop, and supplied the

place with groceries, hardware, and haberdashery of the humblest description. The old man made nets, and did a little cobbling and carpentering. In each home we saw a Bible; and in one a hymn-book, and a few Scriptural prints in black frames. One of the women kept a cock and three or four hens; and all the little dwellings were clean and tidy.

Having chatted with the women, patted the children on their flaxen heads, and distributed a few presents among them, we went up to the plateau where the sheep and the trees were, and prepared our picnic. In a few minutes the cloth was spread, the hampers were unpacked, the corks drawn, and the guests seated.

It was a merry meal, and we were as hungry as befitted people who had spent three or four hours on the sea. We jested, we laughed, we drank healths, we made speeches, we christened the island Juan Fernandez, and poured a libation of champagne upon the scanty turf in consecration of the name. When we had quite done, and were lying listlessly round the remains of our feast, Sir Geoffrey proposed cigars; so we four men strolled away to a point of steep rock at the northward extremity of the island, and left the ladies to amuse themselves till our Havannahs were smoked out. No sooner were we well out of earshot, however, than Buchanan took me by the arm, and, drawing me aside, said in a low, troubled voice,

"I'm at a dead lock, Dundonald. That old man down yonder is of no use, and I have only one sailor and a boy on board. It will be impossible to

get the yacht in sailing trim, in time for us to reach Seaborough Court to-night."

I looked at him in blank dismay.

"WHAT?" said I.

"We shall have to stop here," he replied, "till to-morrow."

"Stop here? On this wretched rock — with two ladies . . . . Nonsense, Buchanan you are joking!"

"I wish to heaven I were," said he, gravely; "but the breeze is freshening every moment, and look at the sky — look at those huge leaden clouds piling up to the windward! I daren't risk it, with the yacht in its present state. There's no help for it."

"But here are four of us. Set us all to work, and let us see what we can do. I'm ready to turn up my sleeves and begin; and Brewer and Stone, of course, will do the same."

"I have thought of that," replied my friend, "and I spoke about it to my mate just now, as he was bringing up the hampers; but it would be of no use. It's seaman's work; and we want all sorts of things that are not to be had in this place. No — all we can do is, to wait patiently till the two fishermen come back; and then send them over to the nearest coast-town for such tools, and tackling, and help as may be needful."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "we may be kept here, at that rate, for a day or two!"

"I hope not — but I fear we can hardly get off to-morrow."

I sat down on the turf in despair.

"What will Miss Carew do?" I ejaculated.

"What will Mrs. Macpherson do?" added Sir Geoffrey, with a comical shrug. "Miss Carew is a sensible, high-spirited, genial woman, and will treat the whole thing as a rare piece of adventure; but Mrs. Macpherson will be as helpless and miserable as a Frenchman on board a Channel steamer."

"We must break it to them," said I.

"I dare not," said he. "Will you?"

"Not for the universe. Ask the parson."

So we called up Mr. Stone and Captain Brewer, and revealed the difficulty we were in. The gallant dragoon scowled, twirled his mustachios, and muttered a few oaths between his teeth; but the rector of Broadmere roared with laughter; protested that a pleasanter calamity could not possibly have befallen us; and went off upon our forlorn hope, with all the assurance in life. He was the very man for the purpose — a man with a laughing eye, a persuasive voice, a large good-humoured mouth, a portly presence, and an inexhaustible fund of good humour. Armed with these good gifts, and with absolute confidence in his own eloquence, our ambassador presented himself before the ladies, and stated our case so successfully that the result surpassed our hopes. They received the dreadful intelligence, not merely with indulgence, but with favour and merriment; and in a few minutes we were all going down to the cottages in a body, to see what arrangements could be made for their accommodation.

The result was, that the largest tenement was

secured for Miss Carew and Mrs. Macpherson, the inhabitants migrating *en masse*, and distributing themselves as well as they could among their neighbours; while we men agreed to pass the night on board. In the meanwhile, a rapid "cleaning up" and "clearing out" was accomplished in the ladies' bower; a supply of rugs, mattresses, blankets, napery, and other comforts was imported from the yacht; and in the course of an hour or two, by the help of a pretty tablecloth, a vase of cottage-flowers, some folding-chairs from Sir Geoffrey's state cabin, and a few such trifles, we had succeeded in turning the single ground-floor room into a very tolerable parlour. In this parlour, later in the day, we took tea; and a very merry tea it was — with Miss Carew at the head of the table. After tea, having no cards, no music, no books, no appliances or means of entertainment whatever, we strolled out again to the higher ground, and watched the sea and the sky. It was a grand sight. The sun had just gone down behind a bank of purple vapour. The waves, now of a dull lead colour, were running high, and beat savagely against the rocks. Troops of wild, rent, ragged clouds fled in tumultuous panic over the face of the heavens; and the moaning of the wind sang a shrill treble to the hoarse bass of the sea. Presently, a tremendous sheet of lightning seemed to rend open the whole broad field of sky, and a mighty peal of thunder shook the very ground beneath our feet. We hastened back to the cottage, and had scarcely reached shelter before the storm began in earnest. And a terrible storm it was. It

lasted nearly the whole night, and kept us all awake till daybreak. But for the snug little creek in which the yacht had been anchored, heaven only knows what would have become of us. In any less sheltered nook, she must have been torn from her moorings like a mere weed; while we must either have sent her adrift to take her chance with the wind and waves, or have risked almost certain death in the attempt to navigate her.

However, none of these misfortunes happened. The morning came; and with it a sea still rolling, a wind still blowing; but sunshine, safety, and prospects evidently mending.

We assembled at nine, for breakfast; all except Sir Geoffrey, who was busy down at the yacht, and somewhat late. Miss Carew presided at the tea-table. It seemed natural to her to take the lead, and natural to us that she should take it. There was grace in all she did; and her manner of doing it, seemed, somehow, to ennoble the commonest action. She could not pour out a cup of tea without appearing to enhance the value of the little courtesy by the way in which she rendered it. I had heard the same thing said of Mrs. Siddons by those who had known her in private; but I never quite believed them till I became acquainted with Miss Carew.

I would not, however, be supposed to compare Miss Carew with Mrs. Siddons in any particular but this; nor even desire to say that in this she did actually resemble her. There was nothing tragic, nor majestic, about Miss Carew. Hers was the un-

conscious dignity of good-breeding; but it was a dignity perfectly compatible with the most airy, brilliant, sportive gaiety that ever bewitched the heart of a man. Her laugh was soft and low, yet musical as a silver *carrillon*; and her eyes — her large, limpid golden-brown eyes — had that half-wild archness and vivacity of expression that has been sometimes indicated by Romney; but has never been rendered in perfection save by the brush of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

It was a merry breakfast, and quite a luxurious one, considering our shipwrecked condition. We had tea, toast, eggs and fish; flowers on the table; and, through the open door, an enchanting glimpse of the sunlit sea. The conversation turned on what we were to do with ourselves all the long day. For the ladies, walking was simply impossible. The heavy rains of the last ten hours had reduced the turfy plateau to a mere bog; and, save the little space of rock and clay on which the cottages stood, the plateau was the island.

"There is not a book to be had in the place," said Miss Carew; "except the Bible."

"Estimable work, no doubt," drawled the dragoon; "but decidedly heavy."

"If we had but a pack of cards, *I* could be content," sighed Mrs. Macpherson.

"Mr. Dundonald, who, I have heard it whispered, is a poet," said Miss Carew, "must be our Feramorz, and invent stories for our entertainment; while Captain Brewer, who so admirably criticises a volume which, I presume, he has never read, can undertake

the part of Fadladeen. The character is, as it were, made for him."

While I was stammering something about my inability to perform the task assigned to me, Sir Geoffrey suddenly darkened the doorway with his six feet three of solid substance.

"Good morning to you all!" said he, in his vociferous, hearty way. "I come before you, ladies and gentlemen, as a public benefactor. Prepare an oration for me. Wreathe the flowing bowl, and twine the chaplet! I am going to make you all happy."

"Do it, my dear fellow," said the rector, "and don't fatigue yourself by saying so much about it beforehand."

"I have found a treasure," shouted Geoffrey, with a face of huge delight. "Guess what it is."

We guessed all the impossible things we could think of; but he shook his head at every fresh suggestion.

"I've bought it for you," said he; "and I've paid twopence a pound for it. What d'ye say to perfect happiness at twopence a pound?"

"That the price is remarkably reasonable," laughed Miss Carew; "but we should like to have a more definite idea of what it really is."

"There's what it is!" said he, producing a good-sized parcel, tied round with a piece of red tape. "It's a shilling's worth of Waste Paper."

"A shilling's worth of Waste Paper!" we repeated with the unanimity of an Exeter Hall chorus.

He burst into a joyous laugh.

"I thought that would astonish you," he said. "Now listen, and I will tell you all about it. I have just been into the shop — you know the general shop in the next cottage — to buy a supply of tea, sugar, tobacco, and so forth, for my two poor fellows down at the yacht. There was a pile of waste paper on the counter, and from this pile of waste paper the good woman who served me took a sheet, or a half-sheet, to wrap up each packet of groceries as she weighed it out. I saw that it was printed matter, and that it looked like good type, and good paper. I took up a piece. It was evidently part of a tale, and looked amusing. I turned over a few more leaves, and found that the lot consisted of a collection of stories, ready folded as if for binding. The title-pages and beginning were wanting; but what there was appeared to be consecutive. I thought at once of the destitution of my friends, and bought up the whole stock on the spot. Now for your vote of thanks!"

"You must wait for that, my dear fellow, till we have seen whether your purchase is readable," said Mr. Stone. "Waste paper at twopence the pound is rather unpromising stuff."

"Horrid trash, no doubt," observed Captain Brewer.

"Trash is better than nothing," said Miss Carew, kindly; "if it only gives us something to laugh at. May I look at your treasure, Sir Geoffrey? I have no doubt we shall quarry a great deal of amusement

out of it, somehow. So! it is folded, but not cut. Perhaps Mr. Dundonald will do us the favour to cut the leaves while Sir Geoffrey breakfasts; and by-and-by we can, perhaps, find a sheltered nook somewhere under the rocks, and take it by turns to read aloud."

Delighted to be employed by her, I seized a knife, and prepared to go to work with enthusiasm. But at the first glance at the first page, my enthusiasm vanished. I paused — flushed up to the roots of my hair — and experienced a very decided inclination to sink through the floor, dive into the depths of the ocean, or, in short, do anything that might enable me to interpose the longest possible distance in the shortest possible time between myself and my friends.

In this shilling's worth of Waste Paper, I recognised my own stories — my unsuccessful, much ridiculed, luckless stories — the very volumes which I had dedicated with such fatal but ingenious obscurity to Miss Carew!

And they had come to this. They were utterly condemned and rejected, given over to the trunk-maker and the grocer, sold off as waste stock, and bought by weight at twopence per pound!

"Well, Phil," said Buchanan, "is the stuff readable?"

"That is a difficult question to answer of any book at first sight," I replied.

"But does it look as if it might be amusing?" said Mrs. Macpherson.

"Madam, I have not yet cut a dozen pages."

Sir Geoffrey laughed.

"What a provoking fellow you are, Phil!" said he. "Don't you see that we want you to hazard an opinion of some sort?"

"Then I adopt Captain Brewer's," I replied, somewhat bitterly. "I have no doubt that it's 'horrid trash,' and that it will be sad waste of time to read it."

"But all our time just now is waste time," said Miss Carew, "so what can we do better than bestow it on waste paper?"

As she said this with a somewhat peculiar intonation, I looked up, and found her eyes fixed full upon me.

An hour later, we had carried out our folding chairs to a little recess among the rocks, just out of sight of the cottages — a pleasant, shady, solitary place, facing the open sea, and carpeted under foot with fine white sand. The dashing of the waves, and an occasional sound of hammering on board the yacht, where Sir Geoffrey was making rapid havoc of his invention, alone disturbed the quiet of our retreat.

"Well," said the rector, lazily, "who is to begin?"

Miss Carew selected a few sheets from the pile of papers, and, looking round the circle with her pretty, imperious air, said: —

"Mr. Dundonald shall begin. Nay, sir — no excuses. From the decisions of this court there is no appeal."

"Oh, queen!" I replied, "to hear is to obey."

And so, having first laid the papers on my head in token of humility, I began the first reading.

CHAPTER III.

TERRIBLE COMPANY.

I AM a Frenchman by birth, and my name is François Thierry. I need not weary you with my early history. Enough, that I committed a political offence — that I was sent to the galleys for it — that I am an exile for it to this day. The brand was not abolished in my time. If I chose, I could show you the fiery letters on my shoulder.

I was arrested, tried, and sentenced, in Paris. I went out of the court with my condemnation ringing in my ears. The rumbling wheels of the prison-van repeated it all the way from Paris to Bicêtre that evening, and all the next day, and the next, and the next, along the weary road from Bicêtre to Toulon. When I look back upon that time, I think I must have been stupefied by the unexpected severity of my sentence, for I remember nothing of the journey, nor of the places where we stopped — nothing but the eternal repetition of "*travaux forcés — travaux forcés — travaux forcés à perpétuité*," over and over, and over again. Late in the afternoon of the third day, the van stopped, the door was thrown open, and I was conducted across a stone yard, through a stone corridor, into a huge stone hall, dimly lighted from above. Here I was interrogated by a military superintendent, and en-

tered by name in a ponderous ledger bound and clasped with iron, like a book in fetters.

"Number Two Hundred and Seven," said the superintendent. "Green."

They took me into an adjoining room, searched, stripped, and plunged me into a cold bath. When I came out of the bath, I put on the livery of the galleys — a coarse canvas shirt, trousers of tawny serge, a red serge blouse, and heavy shoes clamped with iron. Last of all, a green woollen cap. On each leg of the trousers, and on the breast and back of the blouse, were printed the fatal letters "T. F." On a brass label in the front of the cap, were engraved the figures "207." From that moment I lost my individuality. I was no longer François Thierry. I was Number Two Hundred and Seven. The superintendent stood by and looked on.

"Come, be quick," said he, twirling his long moustache between his thumb and forefinger. "It grows late, and you must be married before supper."

"Married!" I repeated.

The superintendent laughed, and lighted a cigar, and his laugh was echoed by the guards and jailers.

Down another stone corridor, across another yard, into another gloomy hall, the very counterpart of the last, but filled with squalid figures, noisy with the clank of fetters, and pierced at each end with a circular opening, through which a cannon's mouth showed grimly.

"Bring Number Two Hundred and Six," said the superintendent, "and call the priest."

Number Two Hundred and Six came from a further corner of the hall, dragging a heavy chain, and along with him a blacksmith, bare-armed and leather-aproned.

"Lie down," said the blacksmith, with an insulting spurn of the foot.

I lay down. A heavy iron ring attached to a chain of eighteen links was then fitted to my ankle, and riveted with the single stroke of the hammer. A second ring next received the disengaged ends of my companion's chain and mine, and was secured in the same manner. The echo of each blow resounded through the vaulted roof like a hollow laugh.

"Good," said the superintendent, drawing a small red book from his pocket. "Number Two Hundred and Seven; attend to the prison code. If you attempt to escape without succeeding, you will be bastinadoed. If you succeed in getting beyond the port, and are then taken, you will receive three years of double chaining. As soon as you are missed, three cannon shots will be fired, and alarm flags will be hoisted on every bastion. Signals will be telegraphed to the maritime guards, and to the police of the ten neighbouring districts. A price will be set upon your head. Placards will be posted upon the gates of Toulon, and sent to every town throughout the empire. It will be lawful to fire upon you, if you cannot be captured alive."

Having read this with grim complacency, the superintendent resumed his cigar, replaced the book in his pocket, and walked away.

All was over now — all the incredulous wonder, the dreamy dulness, the smouldering hope, of the past three days. I was a felon, and (slavery in slavery!) chained to a fellow-felon. I looked up, and found his eyes upon me. He was a swart, heavy-browed, sullen-jawed man of about forty; not much taller than myself, but of immensely powerful build.

"So," said he, "you're for life, are you? So am I."

"How do you know I am for life?" I asked, wearily.

"By that." And he touched my cap roughly with the back of his hand. "Green, for life. Red, for a term of years. What are you in for?"

"I conspired against the Government."

He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Devil's mass! Then you're a gentleman-convict, I suppose! Pity you've not a berth to yourselves — we poor forçats hate such fine company."

"Are there many political prisoners?" I asked, after a moment's pause.

"None, in this department."

Then, as if detecting my unspoken thought, "I am no innocent," he added with an oath. "This is the fourth time I have been here. Did you ever hear of Gasparo?"

"Gasparo the forger?"

He nodded.

"Who escaped three or four months since, and . . ."

"And flung the sentinel over the ramparts, just as he was going to give the alarm. I'm the man."

I had heard of him, as a man who, early in his career, had been sentenced to a prolonged term of solitary imprisonment, and who had come forth from his cell hardened and desperate. I shuddered, and, as I shuddered, found his evil eye taking vindictive note of me. From that moment he hated me. From that moment I loathed him.

A bell rang, and a detachment of convicts came in from labour. They were immediately searched by the guard, and chained up, two and two, to a sloping wooden platform that reached all down the centre of the hall. Our afternoon meal was then served out, consisting of a mess of beans, an allowance of bread and ship-biscuit, and a measure of thin wine. I drank the wine; but I could eat nothing. Gasparo took what he chose from my untouched allowance, and those who were nearest scrambled for the rest. The supper over, a shrill whistle echoed down the hall, each man took his narrow mattress from under the platform which made our common bedstead, rolled himself in a piece of seaweed matting, and lay down for the night. In less than five minutes, all was profoundly silent. Now and then I heard the blacksmith going round with his hammer, testing the gratings, and trying the locks, in all the corridors. Now and then the guard stalked past with his musket on his shoulder. Sometimes a convict moaned, or shook

his fetters in his sleep. Thus the weary hours went by. My companion slept heavily, and even I lost consciousness at last.

I was sentenced to hard labour. At Toulon the hard labour is of various kinds; such as quarrying, mining, pumping in the docks, lading and unlading vessels, transporting ammunition, and so forth. Gasparo and I were employed with about two hundred other convicts in a quarry a little beyond the port. Day after day, week after week, from seven in the morning until seven at night, the rocks echoed with our blows. At every blow, our chains rang and rebounded on the stony soil. In that fierce climate, terrible tempests and tropical droughts succeed each other throughout the summer and autumn. Often, and often, after toiling for hours under a burning sky, have I gone back to prison and to my pallet, drenched to the skin. Thus the last days of the dreary spring ebbed slowly past; and then the more dreary summer; and then the autumn-time came round.

My fellow-convict was a Piedmontese. He had been a burglar, a forger, an incendiary. In his last escape he had committed man-slaughter. Heaven alone knows how my sufferings were multiplied by that abhorred companionship — how I shrank from the touch of his hand — how I sickened if his breath came over me as we lay side by side at night. I strove to disguise my loathing; but in vain. He knew it as well as I knew it, and he revenged himself upon me by every means that a vindictive nature could devise. That he should

tyrannise over me was not wonderful; for his physical strength was gigantic, and he was looked upon as an authorised despot throughout the port; but simple tyranny was the least part of what I had to endure. I had been fastidiously nurtured; he purposely and continually offended my sense of delicacy. I was unaccustomed to bodily labour; he imposed on me the largest share of our daily work. When I needed rest, he would insist on walking. When my limbs were cramped, he would lie down obstinately, and refuse to stir. He delighted to sing blasphemous songs, and relate hideous stories of what he had thought and resolved on in his solitude. He would even twist the chain in such wise that it should gall me at every step. I was at that time just twenty-two years of age, and had been sickly from boyhood. To retaliate, or to defend myself, would have been alike impossible. To complain to the superintendent would only have been to provoke my tyrant to greater cruelty.

There came a day, at length, when his hatred seemed to abate. He allowed me to rest when our hour of repose came round. He abstained from singing the songs I abhorred, and fell into long fits of abstraction. The next morning, shortly after we had begun work, he drew near enough to speak to me in a whisper.

"François, have you a mind to escape?"

I felt the hot blood rush to my face. I clasped my hands. I could not speak.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"To the death."

"Listen, then. To-morrow, Marshal De La Tour d'Auvergne will visit the port. He will inspect the docks, the prisons, the quarries. There will be plenty of cannonading from the forts and the shipping, and if two convicts escape, a volley more or less will attract no attention round about Toulon. Do you understand?"

"You mean that no one will recognize the signals?"

"Not even the sentries at the town-gate — not even the guards in the next quarry. Devil's mass! What can be easier than to strike off each other's fetters with the pickaxe when the superintendent is not looking, and the salutes are firing? Will you venture?"

"With my life!"

"A bargain. Shake hands on it."

I had never touched his hand in fellowship before, and I felt as if my own were blood-stained by the contact. I knew by the sullen fire in his glance, that he interpreted my faltering touch aright.

We were roused an hour earlier than usual the following morning, and went through a general inspection in the prison-yard. Before going to work, we were served with a double allowance of wine. At one o'clock we heard the first far-off salutes from the ships of war in the harbour. The sound ran through me like a galvanic shock. One by one the forts took up the signal. It was repeated by the gun-boats closer in shore. Discharge followed dis-

charge, all along the batteries on both sides of the port, and the air grew thick with smoke.

"As the first shot is fired yonder," whispered Gasparo, pointing to the barracks behind the prison, "strike at the first link of my chain, close to the ankle."

A rapid suspicion flashed across me.

"If I do, how can I be sure that you will free me afterwards? No, Gasparo; you must deal the first blow."

"As you please," he replied, with a laugh and an imprecation.

At the same instant came a flash from the battlements of the barrack close by, and then a thunderous reverberation, multiplied again and again by the rocks around. As the roar burst over our heads, I saw him strike, and felt the fetters fall. Scarcely had the echo of the first gun died away, when the second was fired. It was now Gasparo's turn to be free. I struck, but less skilfully, and had twice to repeat the blow before breaking the stubborn link. We then went on, apparently with our work, standing somewhat close together, with the chain huddled up between us. No one had observed us, and no one, at first sight, could have detected what we had done. At the third shot, a party of officers and gentlemen made their appearance at the bend of the road leading up to the quarry. In an instant every head was turned in their direction; every felon paused in his work; every guard presented arms. At that moment we flung away our caps and pickaxes, scaled the rugged bit of cliff on which we

had been toiling, dropped into the ravine below, and made for the mountain passes that lead into the valley. Encumbered still with the iron anklets to which our chain had been fastened, we could not run very swiftly. To add to our difficulties, the road was uneven, strewn with blocks of fallen granite, and tortuous as the windings of a snake. Suddenly, on turning a sharp angle of projecting cliff, we came upon a little guard-house and a couple of sentries. To retreat was impossible. The soldiers were within a few yards of us. They presented their pieces, and called to us to surrender. Gasparo turned upon me, like a wolf at bay.

"Curse you!" said he, dealing me a tremendous blow; "stay and be taken! I have always hated you!"

I fell, as if struck down by a sledge hammer, and, as I fell, saw him dash one soldier to the ground, dart past the other, heard a shot, and then . . . all became dark, and I know no more.

When I next opened my eyes, I found myself lying on the floor of a small unfurnished room dimly lighted by a tiny window close against the ceiling. It seemed as if weeks had gone by since I lost consciousness. I had scarcely strength to rise, and, having risen, kept my feet with difficulty. Where my head had lain, the floor was wet with blood. Giddy and perplexed, I leaned against the wall, and tried to think.

In the first place, where was I? Evidently in no part of the prison from which I had escaped. There, all was solid stone and iron grating; here

was only whitewashed lath and plaster. I must be in a chamber of the little guard-house: probably in an upper chamber. Where, then, were the soldiers? Where was Gasparo? Had I strength to clamber up to that window, and if so, in what direction did that window look out? I stole to the door, and found it locked. I listened, breathlessly, but could hear no sound either below or above. Creeping back again, I saw that the little window was at least four feet above my head. The smooth plaster offered no projections by which I could raise myself, and there was not even a fireplace in the room from which I could have wrenched a bar to dig out holes in the wall for my feet and hands. Stay! there was my leathern belt, and on the belt, the iron hook which used to sustain my chain when I was not at work. I tore off the hook, picked away the lath and plaster in three or four places, climbed up, opened the window, and gazed out eagerly. Before me, at a distance of not more than thirty-five or forty feet, rose the rugged cliff under whose shelter the guard-house was built; at my feet lay a little kitchen-garden, divided from the base of the rock by a muddy ditch which seemed to run through the ravine; to the right and left, as well as I could judge, lay the rocky path along which our course had been directed. My decision was taken at once. To stay was certain capture; to venture, at all hazards, would make matters no worse. Again I listened, and again all was quiet. I drew myself through the little casement, dropped as gently as I could upon the moist earth, and, crouching against the

wall, asked myself what I should do next. To climb the cliff would be to offer myself as a target to the first soldier who saw me. To venture along the ravine, would be, perhaps, to encounter Gasparo and his captors face to face. Besides it was getting dusk, and, under cover of the night, if I could only conceal myself till then, I might yet escape. But where was that concealment to be found? Heaven be thanked for the thought! There was the ditch!

Only two windows looked out upon the garden from the back of the guard-house. From one of those windows I had just now let myself down, and the other was partly shuttered up. I did not dare, however, openly to cross the garden. I dropped upon my face, and crawled in the furrows between the rows of vegetables, until I came to the ditch. Here the water rose nearly to my waist, but the banks on either side were considerably higher, and, by stooping, I found that I could walk without bringing my head to the level of the road. I thus followed the course of the ditch for some two or three hundred yards in the direction of Toulon, thinking that my pursuers would be less likely to suspect me of doubling back towards prison, than of pushing forward towards the country. Half lying, half crouching under the rank grasses that fringed the bank above, I then watched the gathering shadows. By-and-by I heard the evening gun, and a moment after, something like a distant sound of voices. Hark! was that a shout? Unable to endure the agony of suspense, I lifted my head and peeped cautiously out. There were lights moving in the

windows of the guard-house — there were dark figures in the garden — there were hasty tramplings of feet upon the road above! Presently a light flashed over the water only a few yards from my hiding-place! I slid gently down at full-length, and suffered the foul ooze to close noiselessly over me. Lying thus, I held my breath till the very beatings of my heart seemed to suffocate me, and the veins in my temples were almost bursting. I could bear it no longer — I rose to the surface — I breathed again — I looked — I listened. All was darkness and silence. My pursuers were gone by!

I suffered an hour to go by, too, before I ventured to move again. By that time it was intensely dark, and had begun to rain heavily. The water in the ditch became a brawling torrent, through which I waded, unheard, past the very windows of a guard-house.

After toiling through the water for a mile or more, I ventured out upon the road again: and so, with the rain and wind beating in my face, and the scattered boulders tripping me up continually, I made my way through the whole length of the winding pass, and came out upon the more open country about midnight. With no other guide than the wind, which was blowing from the north-east, and without even a star to help me, I then struck off to the right, following what seemed to be a rough by-road, lying through a valley. By-and-by the rain abated, and I discerned the dark outlines of a chain of hills extending all along to the left of the road. These, I concluded, must be the Maures. All

was well, so far. I had taken the right direction, and was on the way to Italy.

Excepting to sit down now and then for a few minutes by the wayside, I never paused in my flight all the night through. Fatigue and want of food prevented me, it is true, from walking very fast; but the love of liberty was strong within me, and, by keeping steadily on, I succeeded in placing about eighteen miles between myself and Toulon. At five o'clock, just as the day began to dawn, I heard a peal of chimes, and found that I was approaching a large town. In order to avoid this town, I was forced to turn back for some distance, and take to the heights. The sun had now risen, and I dared go no farther; so, having pulled some turnips in a field as I went along, I took refuge in a little lonely copse in a hollow among the hills, and there lay all day in safety. When night again closed in, I resumed my journey, keeping always among the mountains, and coming now and then on grand glimpses of moonlit bays, and tranquil islands lying off the shore; now and then, on pastoral hamlets nestled up among the palmy heights; or on promontories overgrown with the cactus and the aloe. I rested all the second day in a ruined shed at the bottom of a deserted sand-pit, and, in the evening, feeling that I could no longer sustain life without some fitting nourishment, made my way down towards a tiny fishing village on the coast below. It was quite dark by the time I reached the level ground. I walked boldly past the cottages of the fishermen, meeting only an old woman and a little

child on the way, and knocked at the curé's door. He opened it himself. I told my story in half a dozen words. The good man believed and pitied me. He gave me food and wine, an old handkerchief to wrap about my head, an old coat to replace my convict's jacket, and two or three francs to help me on my way. I parted from him with tears.

I walked all that night again, and all the next, keeping somewhat close upon the coast, and hiding among the cliffs during the daytime. On the fifth morning, having left Antibes behind me during the night's march, I came to the banks of the Var; crossed the torrent about half a mile below the wooden bridge; plunged into the pine-woods on the Sardinian side of the frontier; and lay down to rest on Italian ground at last!

How, though comparatively safe, I still pursued my journey by the least frequented ways — how I bought a file at the first hamlet to which I came, and freed myself from the iron anklet — how, having lurked about Nice till my hair and beard had grown, I begged my way on to Genoa — how, at Genoa, I hung about the port, earning a scanty livelihood by any chance work that I could get, and so struggled, somehow, through the inclement winter — how, towards the early spring, I worked my passage on board a small trader from Genoa to Fiumicino, touching at all the ports along the coast — and how, coming slowly up the Tiber in a barge laden with oil and wine, I landed one evening in March on the Ripetta quay, in Rome; how all these things hap-

pened, and what physical hardships I endured in the meanwhile, I have no time here to relate in detail. My object had been to get to Rome, and that object was at last attained. In so large a city, and at so great a distance from the scene of my imprisonment, I was personally safe. I might hope to turn my talents and education to account. I might even find friends among the strangers who would flock thither to the Easter festivals. Full of hope, therefore, I sought a humble lodging in the neighbourhood of the quay, gave up a day or two to the enjoyment of my liberty and of the sights of Rome, and then set myself to find some regular employment.

Regular employment, or, indeed, employment of any kind, was not, however so easily to be obtained. It was a season of distress. The previous harvest had been a failure, and the winter unusually severe. There had also been disturbances in Naples, and the travellers this spring were fewer by some thousands than the ordinary average. So dull a carnival had not been known for years. The artists had sold no paintings, and the sculptors no statues. The cameo-cutters and mosaicists were starving. The tradesmen, the hotel-keepers, the professional ciceroni, were all complaining bitterly. Day by day, my hopes faded and my prospects darkened. Day by day, the few scudi I had scraped together on the passage melted away. I had thought to obtain a clerkship, or a secretaryship, or a situation in some public library. Before three weeks were over, I would gladly have swept a studio. At length there

came a day when I saw nothing before me but starvation; when my last bajocco was expended; when my *padrone* shut the door in my face, and I knew not where to turn for a meal or a shelter. All that afternoon, I wandered hopelessly about the streets. It was Good Friday, of all days of the year. The churches were hung with black; the bells were tolling; the thoroughfares were crowded with people in mourning. I went into the little church of Santa Martina. They were chanting a Miserere, probably with no great skill, but with a pathos that seemed to open up all the sources of my despair.

Outcast that I was, I slept that night under a dark arch near the theatre of Marcellus. The morning dawned upon a glorious day, and I crept out, shivering into the sunshine. Lying crouched against a bit of warm wall, I caught myself wondering more than once how long it would be worth while to endure the agonies of hunger, and whether the brown waters of the Tiber were deep enough to drown a man. It seemed hard to die so young. My future might have been so pleasant, so honourable! The rough life that I had been leading of late, too, had strengthened me in every way, physically and mentally. I had grown taller. My muscles were more developed. I was twice as active, as energetic, as resolute, as I had been a year before. And of what use were these things to me? I must die, and they could only serve to make me die the harder.

I got up and wandered about the streets, as I had wandered the day before. Once I asked for alms, and was repulsed. I followed mechanically

in the stream of carriages and foot passengers, and found myself, by-and-by, in the midst of the crowd that ebbs and flows continually about Saint Peter's during Easter week. Stupefied and weary, I turned aside into the vestibule of the Sagrestia, and cowered down in the shelter of a doorway. Two gentlemen were reading a printed paper wafered against a pillar close by.

"Good heavens!" said one to the other, "that a man should risk his neck for a few pauls!"

"Ay, and with the knowledge that out of eighty workmen, six or eight are dashed to pieces every time," added his companion.

"Shocking! Why, that is an average of ten per cent!"

"No less. It is a desperate service."

"But a fine sight," said the first speaker, philosophically; and with this they walked away.

I sprang to my feet, and read the placard with avidity. It was headed, "Illumination of Saint Peter's," and announced that, eighty workmen being required for the lighting of the dome and cupola, and three hundred for the cornices, pillars, colonnade, and so forth, the *amministratore* was empowered, &c., &c. In conclusion, it stated that every workman employed on the dome and cupola should receive in payment a dinner and twenty-four pauls, the wages of the rest being less than a third of that sum.

A desperate service, it was true; but I was a desperate man. After all, I could but die, and I might as well die after a good dinner as from star-

vation. I went at once to the *amministratore*, was entered in his list, received a couple of pauls as earnest of the contract, and engaged to present myself punctually at eleven o'clock on the following morning. That evening I supped at a street stall, and, for a few bajocchi, obtained leave to sleep on some straw, in a loft over a stable at the back of the Via del Arco.

At eleven o'clock on the morning of Easter Sunday, April the sixteenth, I found myself, accordingly, in the midst of a crowd of poor fellows, most of whom, I dare say, were as wretched as myself, waiting at the door of the administrator's office. The piazza in front of the cathedral was like a moving mosaic of life and colour. The sun was shining, the fountains were playing, the flags were flying over Saint Angelo. It was a glorious sight; but I saw it for only a few moments. As the clocks struck the hour, the folding-doors were thrown open, and we passed, in a crowd, into a hall, where two long tables were laid for our accommodation. A couple of sentinels stood at the door; an usher marshalled us, standing, round the tables, and a priest read grace.

As he began to read, a strange sensation came upon me. I felt impelled to look across to the opposite table, and there . . . . yes, by Heaven! there I saw Gasparo!

He was looking full at me, but his eyes dropped on meeting mine. I saw him turn lividly white. The recollection of all he had made me suffer, and of the dastardly blow that he had dealt me on the

day of our flight, over-powered for the moment even my surprise at seeing him in this place. Oh that I might live to meet him yet, under the free sky, where no priest was praying, and no guards were by!

The grace over, we sat down, and fell to. Not even anger had power to blunt the edge of my appetite just then. I ate like a famishing wolf, and so did most of the others. We were allowed no wine, and the doors were locked upon us, that we might not procure any elsewhere. It was a wise regulation, considering the task we had to perform; but it made us none the less noisy. Under certain circumstances, danger intoxicates like wine; and on this Easter Sunday, we eighty *sanpietrini*, any one of whom might have his brains dashed about the leads before supper-time, ate, talked, jested, and laughed, with a wild gaiety that had in it something appalling.

The dinner lasted long, and when no one seemed disposed to eat more, the tables were cleared. Most of the men threw themselves on the floor and benches, and went to sleep; Gasparo among the number. Seeing this, I could refrain no longer. I went over, and stirred him roughly with my foot.

"Gasparo! You know me?"

He looked up sullenly.

"Devil's mass! I thought you were at Toulon."

"It is not your fault that I am not at Toulon! Listen to me. If you and I survive this night, you shall answer to me for your treachery!"

He glared at me from under his deep brows, and, without replying, turned over on his face again, as if to sleep.

"*Ecco un maladetto!*" (There's an accursed fellow!) said one of the others, with a significant shrug, as I came away.

"Do you know anything of him?" I asked, eagerly.

"*Cospetto!* I know nothing of him; but that he is said to be a wolf and a blasphemer!"

I could learn no more, so I also stretched myself upon the floor, as far as possible from my enemy, and fell profoundly asleep.

At seven, the guards roused those who still slept, and served each man with a small mug of thin wine. We were then formed into a double file, marched round by the back of the cathedral, and conducted up an inclined plane to the roof below the dome. From this point, a long series of staircases and winding passages carried us up between the double walls of the dome; and, at different stages in the ascent, a certain number of us were detached and posted ready for work. I was detached about half-way up, and I saw Gasparo going higher still. When we were all posted, the superintendents came round and gave us our instructions. At a given signal, every man was to pass out through the loop-hole or window before which he was placed, and seat himself astride upon a narrow shelf of wood hanging to a strong rope just below. This rope came through the window, was wound round a roller, and secured from within. At the next signal, a lighted torch would be put into his right hand, and he was to grasp the rope firmly with his left. At the third signal, the rope was to be unwound from

within by an assistant placed there for the purpose, he was to be allowed to slide rapidly down, over the curve of the dome, and, while thus sliding, was to apply his torch to every lamp he passed in his downward progress.

Having received these instructions, we waited. each man at his window, until the first signal should be given.

It was fast getting dark, and the silver illumination had been lighted since seven. All the great ribs of the dome, as far as I could see; all the cornices and friezes of the façade below; all the columns and parapets of the great colonnade surrounding the piazza four hundred feet below, were traced out in lines of paper lanterns, the light from which, subdued by the paper, gleamed with a silvery fire, which had a magical and wondrous look. Between and among these *lanternoni*, were placed, at different intervals all over the cathedral on the side facing the piazza, iron cups called *padelle*, ready filled with tallow and turpentine. To light those on the dome and cupola, was the perilous task of the *sanpietrini;* when they were all lighted, the golden illumination would be effected.

A few moments of intense suspense elapsed. At every second, the evening grew darker, the *lanternoni* burned brighter, the surging hum of thousands in the piazza and streets below, rose louder to our ears. I felt the quickening breath of the assistant at my shoulder — I could almost hear the beating of my heart. Suddenly, like the passing of an electric current, the first signal flew from lip to lip.

I got out, and crossed my legs firmly round the board — with the second signal, I seized the blazing torch — with the third, I felt myself launched, and, lighting every cup as I glided past, saw all the mountainous dome above and below me spring into lines of leaping flame. The clock was now striking eight, and when the last stroke sounded, the whole cathedral was glowing in outlines of fire. A roar, like the roar of a great ocean, rose up from the multitude below, and seemed to shake the very dome against which I was clinging. I could even see the light upon the gazing faces, the crowd upon the bridge of St. Angelo, and the boats swarming along the Tiber.

Having dropped safely to the full length of my rope, and lighted my allotted share of lamps, I was now sitting in secure enjoyment of this amazing scene. All at once, I felt the rope vibrate. I looked up, saw a man clinging by one hand to the iron rod supporting the *padelle*, and with the other . . . . . Merciful Heaven! It was the Piedmontese firing the rope above me with his torch!

I had no time for thought — I acted upon instinct. It was done in one fearful moment. I clambered up like a cat, dashed my torch full in the felon's face, and grasped the rope an inch or two above the spot where it was burning! Blinded and baffled, he uttered a terrible cry, and dropped like a stone. Through all the roar of the living ocean below, I could hear the dull crash with which he came down upon the leaded roof. Echoing through

all the years that have gone by since that night, I hear it now.

I had scarcely drawn breath, when I found myself being hauled up. The assistance came not a moment too soon, for I was sick and giddy with horror, and fainted as soon as I was safe in the corridor. The next day I waited on the *amministratore*, and told him all that had happened. My statement was corroborated by the vacant rope from which Gasparo had descended, and the burnt fragment by which I had been drawn up. The *amministratore* repeated my story to a prelate high in office; and while none, even of the *sanpietrini*, suspected that my enemy had come by his death in any unusual manner, the truth was whispered from palace to palace until it reached the Vatican. I received much sympathy, and such pecuniary assistance as enabled me to confront the future without fear. Since that time my fortunes have been various. I have lived in many countries, and known many strange adventures, but never, before or since, found myself in such terrible company as on the dome of St. Peter's, that memorable Easter Sunday night.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ELEVENTH OF MARCH.

(From a Pocket-book of Forty Years ago.)

FORTY years ago!

An old pocket-book lies before me, bound in scarlet morocco, and fastened with a silver clasp. The leather is mildewed; the silver tarnished; the paper yellow; the ink faded. It has been hidden away at the back of an antique oaken bureau since the last day of the year during which I had it in use; and that was forty years ago. Aye, here is a page turned down — turned down at Wednesday, March the eleventh, eighteen hundred and twenty-six. The entry against that date is brief and obscure enough.

"Wednesday, March 11th. — Walked from Frascati to Palazzuola, the ancient site of Alba Longa, on the Alban lake. Lodged at Franciscan convent. Brother Geronimo. Dare one rely on the testimony of the senses? *Dieu sait tout.*"

Brief as it is, however, that memorandum fires a train of long-dormant memories, and brings back with painful vividness all the circumstances to which it bears reference. I will endeavour to relate them as calmly and succinctly as possible.

I started on foot from Frascati immediately after breakfast, and rested midway in the shade of a

wooded ravine between Marino and the heights of Alba Longa. I seem to remember every trivial incident of that morning walk. I remember how the last year's leaves crackled under my feet, and how the green lizards darted to and fro in the sunlight. I fancy I still hear the slow drip of the waters that trickled down the cavernous rocks on either hand. I fancy I still smell the heavy perfume of the violets among the ferns. It was not yet noon when I emerged upon the upper ridge, and took the path that leads to Monte Cavo. The woodcutters were busy among the chestnut slopes of Palazzuola. They paused in their work, and stared at me sullenly as I passed by. Presently a little turn in the footway brought the whole lake of Albano before my eyes. Blue, silent, solitary, set round with overhanging woods, it lay in the sunshine, four hundred feet below, like a sapphire at the bottom of a malachite vase. Now and then, a soft breath from the west ruffled the placid mirror, and blurred the pictured landscape on its surface. Now and then, a file of mules, passing unseen among the forest-paths, sent a faint sound of tinkling bells across the lake. I sat down in the shade of a clump of cork-trees, and contemplated the panorama. To my left, on a precipitous platform at the verge of the basin, with Monte Cavo towering up behind, stretched the long white façade of the Convent of Palazzuola; on the opposite height, standing clear against the sky, rose the domes and pines of Castel Gondolfo; to the far right, in the blinding sunshine of the Campagna, lay Rome and the Etruscan hills.

In this spot I established myself for the day's sketching. Of so vast a scene, I could, necessarily, only select a portion. I chose the Convent, with its background of mountain, and its foreground of precipice and lake; and proceeded patiently to work out, first the leading features, and next the minuter details of the subject. Thus occupied (with an occasional pause to watch the passing of a cloud-shadow, or listen to the chiming of a distant chapel-bell), I lingered on, hour after hour, till the sun hung low in the west, and the woodcutters were all gone to their homes. I was now at least three miles from either the town of Albano or the village of Castel Gondolfo, and was, moreover, a stranger to the neighbourhood. I looked at my watch. There remained but one half hour of good daylight, and it was important that I should find my way before the dusk closed in. I rose reluctantly, and, promising myself to return to the same spot on the morrow, packed away my sketch, and prepared for the road.

At this moment, I saw a monk standing in an attitude of meditation upon a little knoll of rising ground some fifty yards ahead. His back was turned towards me; his cowl was up, his arms were folded across his breast. Neither the splendour of the heavens, nor the tender beauty of the earth, was anything to him. He seemed unconscious even of the sunset.

I hurried forward, eager to inquire my nearest path along the woods that skirt the lake; and my shadow lengthened out fantastically before me as I

ran. The monk turned abruptly. His cowl fell. He looked at me face to face. There were not more than eighteen yards between us. I saw him as plainly as I now see the page on which I write. Our eyes met ... My God! shall I ever forget those eyes?

He was still young, still handsome, but so lividly pale, so emaciated, so worn with passion, and penance, and remorse, that I stopped involuntarily, like one who finds himself on the brink of a chasm. We stood thus for a few seconds — both silent, both motionless. I could not have uttered a syllable, had my life depended on it. Then, as abruptly as he had turned towards me, he turned away and disappeared among the trees. I remained for some minutes gazing after him. My heart throbbed painfully. I shuddered, I knew not why. The very air seemed to have grown thick and oppressive; the very sunset, so golden a moment since, had turned suddenly to blood.

I went on my way, disturbed and thoughtful. The livid face and lurid eyes of the monk haunted me. I dreaded every turn of the path, lest I should again encounter them. I started when a twig fell, or a dead leaf fluttered down beside me. I was almost ashamed of the sense of relief with which I heard the sound of voices some few yards in advance, and, emerging upon an open space close against the convent, saw some half dozen friars strolling to and fro in the sunset. I inquired my way to Albano, and learned that I was still more than two miles distant.

"It will be quite dark before the Signore arrives," said one, courteously. "The Signore would do well to accept a cell at Palazzuola for the night."

I remembered the monk, and hesitated.

"There is no moon now," suggested another; "and the paths are unsafe for those who do not know them."

While I was yet undecided, a bell rang, and three or four of the loiterers went in.

"It is our supper hour," said the first speaker. "The Signore will at least condescend to share our simple fare; and afterwards, if he still decides to sleep at Albano, one of our younger brethren shall accompany him as far as the Cappucini, at the entrance to the town."

I accepted this proposition gratefully, followed my entertainers through the convent gates, and was ushered into a stone hall, furnished with a long dining table, a pulpit, a clock, a double row of deal benches, and an indifferent copy of the Last Supper of Leonardo da Vinci. The Superior advanced to welcome me.

"You have come among us, Signore," he said, "on an evening when our table is but poorly provided. Although this is not one of the appointed fast-days of the Church, we have been abstaining at Palazzuola in memory of certain circumstances connected with our own brotherhood. I hope, however, that our larder may be found to contain something better suited to a traveller's appetite than the fare you now see before you."

Saying thus, he placed me at his right hand at

the upper end of the board, and there stood till the monks were all in their places. He then repeated a Latin grace; after which each brother took his seat and began. They were twenty-three in number, twelve on one side, and eleven on the other; but I observed that a place was left vacant near the foot of the table, as if the twelfth man were yet to come. The twelfth, I felt sure, was he whom I had encountered on the way. Once possessed with this conviction, I could not keep from watching the door. Strange! I so dreaded and loathed his coming, that I almost felt as if his presence would be less intolerable than the suspense in which I awaited it!

In the meantime the monks ate in silence; and even the Superior, whose language and address were those of a well-informed man, seemed constrained and thoughtful. Their supper was of the most frugal description, and consisted of only bread, salad, grapes, and maccaroni. Mine was before long reinforced with a broiled pigeon and a flask of excellent Orvieto. I enjoyed my fare, however, as little as they seemed to enjoy theirs. Fasting as I was, I had no appetite. Weary as I was, I only longed to push my plate aside, and resume my journey.

"The Signore will not think of going farther tonight," said the Superior, after an interval of prolonged silence.

I muttered something about being expected at Albano.

"Nay, but it is already dusk, and the sky hath clouded over suddenly within the last fifteen mi-

nutes," urged he. "I fear much that we have a storm approaching. What sayest thou, brother Antonio?"

"It will be a wild night," replied the brother with whom I had first spoken.

"Aye, a wild night," repeated an old monk, lower down the table; "like this night last year — like this night two years ago!"

The superior struck the table angrily with his open hand.

"Silence!" he exclaimed authoritatively. "Silence there; and let brother Anselmo bring lights."

It was now so dark that I could scarcely distinguish the features of the last speaker, or those of the monk who rose and left the room. Again the profoundest silence fell upon all present. I could hear the footsteps of brother Anselmo echo down the passage, till they died away; and I remember listening vaguely to the ticking of the clock at the farther end of the refectory, and comparing it in my own mind to the horrible beating of an iron heart. Just at that moment a sharp gust of wind moaned past the windows, bearing with it a prolonged reverberation of distant thunder.

"Our storms up here in the mountain are severe and sudden," said the Prior, resuming our conversation at the point where it had been interrupted; "and even the waters of yonder placid lake are sometimes so tempestuous that no boat dare venture across. I fear, Signore, that you will find it impossible to proceed to Albano."

"Should the tempest come up, reverend father,"

I replied, "I will undoubtedly accept your hospitality, and be grateful for it; but if . . . ."

I broke off abruptly. The words failed on my lips, and I pushed away the flask from which I was about to fill my glass.

Brother Anselmo had brought in the lamps, and there, in the twelfth seat at the opposite side of the table, sat the monk. I had not seen him take his place. I had not heard him enter. Yet there he sat, pale and deathlike, with his burning eyes fixed full upon me! No one noticed him. No one spoke to him. No one helped him to the dishes on the table. He neither ate, nor drank, nor held companionship with any of his fellows; but sat among them like an excommunicated wretch, whose penance was silence and fasting.

"You do not eat, Signore," said the prior.

"I — I thank you, reverend father," I faltered. "I have dined."

"I fear, indifferently. Would you like some other wine? Our cellar is not so ill-furnished as our larder."

I declined by a gesture.

"Then we will retire to my room, and take coffee."

And the superior rose, repeated a brief Latin thanksgiving, and ushered me into a small well-lighted parlour, opening off a passage at the upper end of the hall, where there were some half-dozen shelves of books, a couple of easy chairs, a bright wood fire, and a little table laden with coffee and cakes. We had scarcely seated ourselves when a

tremendous peal of thunder seemed to break immediately over the convent, and was followed by a cataract of rain.

"The Signore is safer here than on the paths between Palazzuola and Albano," said the Superior, sipping his coffee.

"I am, indeed," I replied. "Do I understand that you had a storm here on the same night last year, and the year before?"

The Prior's face darkened.

"I cannot deny the coincidence," he said, reluctantly; "but it is a mere coincidence, after all. The — the fact is that a very grievous and terrible catastrophe happened to our community on this day two years ago; and the brethren believe that heaven sends the tempest in memory of that event. Monks, Signore, are superstitious; and if we consider their isolated lives, it is not surprising that they should be so."

I bowed assent. The Prior was evidently a man of the world.

"Now, with regard to Palazzuola," continued he, disregarding the storm, and chatting on quite leisurely; "here are twenty-three brethren, most of them natives of the small towns among the mountains hereabout; and of that twenty-three, not ten have even been so far as Rome in their lives."

"Twenty-three," I repeated. "Twenty-four, surely, *mio padre!*"

"I did not include myself," said the Prior, stiffly.

"Neither did I include you," I replied; "but

I counted twenty-four of the order at table, just now."

The Prior shook his head.

"No, no, Signore," said he. "Twenty-three only."

"But I am positive," said I.

"And so am I," rejoined he, politely but firmly.

I paused. I was certain. I could not be mistaken.

"Nay, *mio padre*," I said; "they were twenty-three at first; but the brother who came in afterwards made the twenty-fourth."

"Afterwards!" echoed the Prior. "I am not aware that any brother came in afterwards."

"A sickly, haggard-looking monk," pursued I, "with singularly bright eyes — eyes which, I confess, produced on me a very unpleasant impression. He came in just before the lights were brought."

The Prior moved uneasily in his chair, and poured out another cup of coffee.

"Where did you say he sat; Signore?" said he.

"In the vacant seat at the lower end of the table, on the opposite side to myself."

The Prior set down his coffee untasted, and rose in great agitation.

"For God's sake, Signore," stammered he, "be careful what you say! Did you — did you see this? Is this true?"

"True?" I repeated, trembling I knew not why, and turning cold from head to foot. "As true as that I live and breathe! Why do you ask?"

"Sickly and haggard-looking, with singularly

bright eyes," said the Prior, looking very pale himself. "Had it — had it the appearance of a young man?"

"Of a young man worn with suffering and remorse," I replied. "But — but it was not the first time, *mio padre!* I saw him before — this afternoon — down near the chestnut-woods, on a knoll of rising ground, overlooking the lake. He was standing with his back to the sunset."

The Prior fell on his knees before a little carved crucifix that hung beside the fireplace.

"REQUIEM ÆTERNUM DONA EIS, DOMINE; ET LUX PERPETUA LUCEAT EIS," said he, brokenly.

The rest of his prayer was inaudible, and he remained for some minutes with his face buried in his hands.

"I implore you to tell me the meaning of this," I said, when he at length rose, and sank, still pale and agitated, into his chair.

"I will tell what I may, Signore," he replied; "but I must not tell you all. It is a secret that belongs to our community, and none of us are at liberty to repeat it. Two years ago, one of our brethren was detected in the commission of a great crime. He had suffered, struggled against it, and at last, urged by a terrible opportunity, committed it. His life paid for the offence. One who was deeply wronged by the deed, met him as he was flying from the spot, and slew him as he fled. Signore, the name of that monk was the Fra Geronimo. We buried him where he fell, on a knoll of rising ground close against the chestnut woods that border

the path to Marino. We had no right to lay his remains in consecrated ground; but we fast, and say masses for his soul, on each anniversary of that fearful day."

The Prior paused and wiped his brow.

"But, *mio padre* . . ." I began.

"This day last year," interrupted he, "one of the woodcutters yonder took a solemn oath that he met the Fra Geronimo on that very knoll, at sunset. Our brethren believed the man — but I, heaven forgive me! was incredulous. Now, however . . ."

"Then — then you believe," faltered I, "you believe that I have seen . . ."

"Brother Geronimo," said the Prior, solemnly.

And I believe it too. I am told, perhaps, that it was an illusion of the senses. Granted; but, is not such an illusion, in itself, a phenomenon as appalling as the veriest legend that superstition evokes from the world beyond the grave? How shall we explain the nature of the impression? Whence comes it? By what material agency is it impressed upon the brain? These are questions leading to abysses of speculation before which the sceptic and the philosopher alike recoil — questions which I am unable to answer. I only know that these things came within the narrow radius of my own experience; that I saw them with my own eyes; and that they happened just forty years ago, on the eleventh of March, anno Domini eighteen hundred and twenty-six.

CHAPTER V.

THE PROFESSOR'S STORY.

BETWEEN eight and ten years ago, I embarked in a long vacation campaign among the Alps of Savoy. I was alone. My object was not amusement, but study. I occupy a Professor's Chair, and I was engaged in the collection of materials for a work on the Flora of the higher Alps; and, to this end, travelled chiefly on foot. My route lay far from the beaten paths and passes. I often journeyed for days through regions where there were neither inns nor villages. I often wandered from dawn till dusk, among sterile steeps unknown even to the herdsmen of the upper pasturages, and untrodden save by the chamois and the hunter. I thought myself fortunate at those times, if, towards evening, I succeeded in steering my way down to the nearest châlet, where, in company with a half-savage mountaineer and a herd of milch goats, I might find the shelter of a raftered roof, and a supper of black bread and whey.

On one particular evening I had gone farther than usual, in pursuit of the Senecio Unifloris: a rare plant, which I had hitherto believed indigenous to the southern valleys of Monte Rosa, but of which I here succeeded in finding one or two indifferent

specimens. It was a wild and barren district, difficult to distinguish with any degree of precision on the map; but lying among the upper defiles of the Val de Bagnes, between the Mont Pleureur and the Grand Combin. On the waste of rock-strewn moss to which I had climbed, there was no sign of human habitation. Above me lay the great ice-fields of Corbassière, surmounted by the silver summits of the Graffenière and Combin. To my left, the sun was going down rapidly behind a forest of smaller peaks, the highest of which, as well as I could judge from Osterwald's map, was the Mont Blanc de Cheilon. In ten minutes more, those peaks would be crimson; in one short half hour, it would be night.

To be benighted on an Alpine plateau towards the latter end of September is not a desirable position. I knew it by recent experience, and had no wish to repeat the experiment. I therefore began retracing my route as rapidly as I could, descending in a north-westerly direction, and keeping a sharp look-out for any châlet that might offer a shelter for the night. Pushing forward thus, I found myself presently at the head of a little verdant ravine, channelled, as it were, in the face of the plateau. I hesitated. It seemed, through the gathering darkness, as if I could discern vague traces of a path trampled here and there in the deep grass. It also seemed as if the ravine trended down towards the upper pastures which were my destination. By following it I could scarcely go wrong. Where there is grass, there are generally cattle and a châlet; and I might possibly find a nearer resting-

place than I had anticipated. At all events, I resolved to try it.

The ravine proved shorter than I had expected, and, instead of leading immediately downward, opened upon a second plateau, through which a well-worn footway struck off abruptly to the left. Pursuing this footway with what speed I might, I came, in the course of a few more minutes, to a sudden slope, at the bottom of which, in a basin almost surrounded by gigantic limestone cliffs, lay a small dark lake, a few fields, and a châlet. The rose-tints had by this time come and gone, and the snow had put on that ghostly grey which precedes the dark. Before I could descend the slope, skirt the lake, and mount the little eminence on which the house stood, sheltered by its background of rocks, it was already night, and the stars were in the sky.

I went up to the door and knocked; no one answered. I opened the door; all was dark. I paused — held my breath — listened — fancied I could distinguish a low sound, as of some one breathing. I knocked again. My second knock was followed by a quick noise, like the pushing back of a chair, and a man's voice said, hoarsely: —

"Who is there?"

"A traveller," I replied, "seeking shelter for the night."

A heavy footstep crossed the floor, a sharp flash shot through the darkness, and I saw, by the flickering tinder, a man's face bending over a lantern. Having lighted it, he said, with scarce a glance

towards the door, "Enter, traveller," and went back to his stool beside the empty hearth.

I entered. The châlet was of a better sort than those usually found at so great an altitude, consisting of a dairy and houseplace, with a loft overhead. A table and three or four wooden stools occupied the centre of the room. The rafters were hung with bunches of dried herbs, and long strings of Indian corn. A clock ticked in a corner: a kind of rude pallet upon trestles stood in a recess beside the fireplace; and through a lattice at the further end, I could hear the cows feeding in the outhouse beyond.

Somewhat perplexed by the manner of my reception, I unstrapped my knapsack and specimen-box, took possession of the nearest stool, and asked if I could have supper?

My host looked up, with the air of a man intent on other things. I repeated the inquiry.

"Yes," he said, wearily; "you can eat, traveller."

With this, he crossed to the other side of the hearth, stooped over a dark object, which until now I had not observed, crouched in the corner, and muttered a word or two of unintelligible patois. The object moaned; lifted up a white bewildered woman's face; and rose slowly from the floor. The herdsman pointed to the table, and went back to his stool and his former attitude. The woman, after pausing helplessly, as if in the effort to remember something, went out into the dairy, came back with a brown loaf and a pan of milk, and set them before me on the table.

As long as I live I shall never forget the expression of that woman's face. She was young, and very pretty; but her beauty seemed turned to stone. Every feature bore the seal of an unspeakable terror. Every gesture was mechanical. In the lines that furrowed her brow there was a haggardness more terrible than the haggardness of age. In the locking of her lips there was an anguish beyond the utterance of words. Though she served me, I do not think she saw me. There was no recognition in her eyes; no apparent consciousness of any object or circumstance external to the secret of her own despair. All this I noticed during the few brief moments in which she brought me my supper. That done, she crept away, abjectly, into the same dark corner, and sank down again: a mere huddled heap of clothing.

As for her husband, there was something unnatural in the singular immobility of his attitude. There he sat, his body bent forward, his chin resting on his palms, his eyes staring fixedly at the blackened hearth, and not even the involuntary quiver of a nerve to show that he lived and breathed. I could not determine his age, analyse and observe his features as I might. He looked old enough to be fifty, and young enough to be forty; and was a fine muscular mountaineer, with that grave cast of countenance which is peculiar to the Valaisan peasant.

I could not eat. The keenness of my mountain appetite was gone. I sat, as if fascinated, in the presence of this strange pair; observing both, and, apparently, by both as much forgotten as if I had never crossed their threshold. We remained thus,

by the dim light of the lantern, and the monotonous ticking of the clock, for some forty minutes or more: all profoundly silent. Sometimes the woman stirred, as if in pain; sometimes the cows struck their horns against the manger in the outhouse. The herdsman alone sat motionless, like a man cast in bronze. At length the clock struck nine. I had by this time become so nervous that I almost dreaded to hear my own voice interrupt the silence. However, I pushed my plate noisily aside, and said, with as much show of ease as I could muster: —

"Have you any place, friend, in which I can sleep to-night?"

He shifted his position uneasily, and, without looking round, replied in the same form of words as before:

"Yes; you can sleep, traveller."

"Where? In the loft above?"

He nodded affirmatively, took the lantern from the table, and turned towards the dairy. As we passed, the light streamed for a moment over the crouching figure in the corner.

"Is your wife ill?" I asked, pausing and looking back.

His eyes met mine for the first time, and a shudder passed over his body.

"Yes," he said, with an effort. "She is ill."

I was about to ask what ailed her, but something in his face arrested the question on my lips. I know not, to this hour, what that something was. I could not define it then; I cannot describe it now; but I hope I may never see it in a living face again.

I followed him to the foot of a ladder at the further end of the dairy.

"Up there," he said; placed the lantern in my hand; and strode heavily back into the darkness.

I went up, and found myself in a long low granary, stored with corn-sacks, hay, onions, rock-salt, cheeses, and farming implements. In one corner were the unusual luxuries of a mattress, a rug, and a three-legged stool. My first care was to make a systematic inspection of the loft and all that it contained; my next, to open a little unglazed lattice with a sliding shutter, just opposite my bed. The night was brilliant, and a stream of fresh air and moonlight poured in. Oppressed by a strange undefined sense of trouble, I extinguished the lantern, and stood looking out upon the solemn peaks and glaciers. Their solitude seemed to me more than usually awful; their silence more than usually profound. I could not help associating them, in some vague way, with the mystery in the house. I perplexed myself with all kinds of wild conjectures as to what the nature of that mystery might be. The woman's face haunted me like an evil dream. Again and again, I went from the lattice to the ladder, and from the ladder back to the lattice, vainly listening for any sound in the rooms below. A long time went by thus, until at length, overpowered by the fatigues of the day, I stretched myself on the mattress, took my knapsack for a pillow, and fell fast asleep.

I can guess neither how long my sleep lasted, nor from what cause I awoke. I only know that my sleep was dreamless and profound; and that I

started from it suddenly, unaccountably, trembling in every nerve, and possessed by an overwhelming sense of danger.

Danger! Danger of what kind? From whom? From whence? I looked round — I was alone, and the quiet moon was shining in as serenely as when I fell asleep. I listened — all was still. I got up, walked to and fro, reasoned with myself; but all in vain. I could not stay the beatings of my heart. I could not master the horror that oppressed my brain. I felt that I dared not lie down again; that I must get out of the house somehow, and at once; that to stay would be death; that the instinct by which I was governed must at all costs be obeyed.

I could not bear it. Resolved to escape, or, at all events, to sell life dearly, I strapped on my knapsack, armed myself with my iron-headed alpenstock, took my large clasp knife between my teeth, and began, cautiously and noiselessly, to descend the ladder. When I was about half-way down, the alpenstock, which I had been keeping studiously clear of the ladder, encountered some dairy vessel, and sent it, clattering, to the ground. Caution, after this, was useless. I sprang forward, reached the outer room at a bound, and found it, to my amazement, deserted, with the door wide open and the moonlight streaming in. Suspecting a trap, my first impulse was to stand still, with my back against the wall, prepared for a desperate defence. All was silent. I could only hear the ticking of the clock, and the heavy beating of my own heart. The pallet was empty. The bread and milk were still standing

where I had left them on the table. The herdsman's stool occupied the same spot by the desolate hearth. But he and his wife were gone — gone in the dead of night — leaving me, a stranger, in the sole occupation of their home!

While I was yet irresolute whether to go or stay, and while I was yet wondering at the strangeness of my position, I heard, or fancied I heard, something — something that might have been the wind, save that there was no air stirring — something that might have been the wailing of a human voice. I held my breath — heard it again — followed it as it died away. . . . I had not far to go. A line of light gleaming under the door of a shed at the back of the châlet, and a cry bitterer and more piercing than any I had yet heard, guided me direct to the spot.

I looked in — recoiled, giddy with horror — went back, as if fascinated; and so stood for some moments, unable to move, to think, to do anything but stare helplessly upon the scene before me. To this day, I cannot recall it without something of the same sickening sensation.

Inside that hut, by the light of a pine-torch thrust into an iron sconce against the wall, I saw the herdsman kneeling by the body of his wife; grieving over her like another Othello; kissing her white lips, wiping blood-stains from her yellow hair, raving out inarticulate cries of passionate remorse, and calling down all the curses of Heaven upon his own head, and the head of some other man who had brought this crime upon him! I understood it all

now — all the mystery, all the terror, all the despair. She had sinned against him, and he had slain her. She was quite dead. The very knife, with its hideous testimony fresh upon the blade, lay near the door.

I turned and fled — blindly, wildly, like a man with bloodhounds on his track; now, stumbling over stones; now, torn by briars; now, pausing a moment to take breath; now, rushing forward faster than before; now, battling up-hill with straining lungs and trembling limbs; now, staggering across a level space; now, making for the higher ground again, and casting never a glance behind! At length I reached a bare plateau above the line of vegetation, where I dropped exhausted. Here I lay for a long time, beaten and stupefied, until the intense cold of approaching dawn forced upon me the necessity of action. I rose, and looked round on a scene no feature of which was familiar to me. The very snow-peaks, though I knew they must be the same, looked unlike the peaks of yesterday. The very glaciers, seen from a different point of view, assumed new forms, as if on purpose to baffle me. Thus perplexed, I had no resource but to climb the nearest height from which it was probable that a general view might be obtained. I did so, just as the last belt of purple mist turned golden in the east, and the sun rose.

A superb panorama lay stretched before me, peak beyond peak, glacier beyond glacier, valley and pine forest and pasture slope, all flushed and palpitating in the crimson vapours of the dawn.

Here and there, I could trace the foam of a waterfall, or the silver thread of a torrent; here and there, the canopy of faint blue smoke that wavered upward from some hamlet among the hills. Suddenly my eyes fell upon a little lake — a sullen pool — lying in the shade of an amphitheatre of rocks some eight hundred feet below. Until that moment, the night and its terrors appeared to have passed away like a wicked vision; but now the very sky seemed darkened above me. Yes — there it all lay at my feet. Yonder was the path by which I had descended from the plateau, and, lower still, the accursed châlet, with its background of rugged cliff and overhanging precipice. Well might they lie in shadow! Well might the sunlight refuse to touch the ripples of that lake with gold, and to light up the windows of that house with an illumination direct from heaven!

Thus standing, thus looking down, I became aware of a strange sound — a sound singularly distinct, but far away — a sound sharper and hollower than the fall of an avalanche, and unlike anything that I remembered to have heard. While I was yet asking myself what it could be, or whence it came, I saw a considerable fragment of rock detach itself from one of the heights overhanging the lake, bound rapidly from ledge to ledge, and fall, with a heavy plash, into the water below. It was followed by a cloud of dust, and a prolonged reverberation, like the rolling of distant thunder. Next moment, a dark fissure sprang into sight all down the face of the precipice — the fissure became a chasm — the whole cliff wavered before my eyes — wavered, parted,

sent up a cataract of earth and stones — and slid slowly down — down — down into the valley.

Deafened by the crash, and blinded by the dust, I covered my face with my hands, and anticipated instant destruction. The echoes, however, died away, and were succeeded by a solemn silence. The plateau on which I stood remained firm and unshaken. I looked up. The sun was shining as serenely, the landscape sleeping as peacefully as before. Nothing was changed, save that a wide white scar now defaced all one side of the great limestone basin below, and a ghastly mound of ruin filled the valley at its foot. Beneath that mound lay buried all record of the crime to which I had been an unwilling witness. The very mountains had come down and covered it — nature had obliterated it from the face of the Alpine solitude. Lake and châlet, victim and executioner, had disappeared for ever, and the place thereof knew them no more.

CHAPTER VI.

BRADSHAW THE BETRAYER.

Oh, Doricles! your praises are too large.
Winter's Tale.

I AM a conscientious traveller, and I believe in Mr. Murray. I visit all the churches, climb all the mountains, admire all the pictures and put up at all the inns which he recommends to my notice. When he predicts that "the traveller will behold with a shudder the boiling torrent which plunges beneath his feet to a depth of, &c. &c.," I peep over the precipice and shudder accordingly. When he kindly observes that "the traveller will here leave the carriage, and, by ascending the bank at the bend of the road, be delighted with a most extensive and beautiful prospect," I get out, and am delighted on the spot. In short, Mr. Murray tells me what is proper to be done, and I do it; which saves a great deal of trouble, and secures me against anything like misplaced enthusiasm.

There was also a time when I believed in Mr. Bradshaw, and pinned my faith upon the "Continental Railway Guide;" but that dream is over. Faithless Bradshaw! an impartial public shall decide our grievance.

It was between four and six years ago. I had been all about the Pyrenees, and a little way into

Spain, and was now jogging homeward by easy stages through the north of France. Travelling alternately by rail and diligence, and occasionally settling down in some large town for the sake of exploring the neighbourhood, I came one day to the city of Abbeville, and took up my quarters at the hotel *Tête de Bœuf*.

"Mine inn" was spacious and gloomy; my bedroom spacious and gloomy; my bed a catafalque with dusty amber satin hangings. There were faded frescos on all the walls. There was a smell of damp earth in all the passages. Everything was dismal. Everything was decaying. The very waiter looked grey and mouldy, as if he had been laid aside somewhere and forgotten, till the moment of my arrival.

I sat down amid my luggage, and sighed. The waiter sighed likewise.

"Anything to be seen in this town?" I asked, despondingly.

The waiter stroked his chin, and eyed me contemplatively.

"The Cathedral, M'sieur."

"Nothing but the Cathedral?"

"The city, M'sieur."

"Oh!" said I, "the Cathedral and the city. Anything else?"

He coughed, dusted a chair, and affected not to hear. I always know what that sort of deafness means. I am a traveller, and used to it. There was a long pause.

"When can I dine?" I inquired at last.

"Table-d'hôte at six, M'sieur," sighed the waiter.

I glanced at my watch, and found that it wanted ten minutes to four.

"Very well," said I, resignedly. "I will stroll about till six."

Whereupon my melancholy friend bowed me downstairs, and into the courtyard.

A few steps brought me to the Cathedral. It was grey and shadowy, and vast, and quite bare of decorations. There was a triangular stand of votive tapers flickering and guttering in one corner, and a very old peasant woman on her knees before the altar. I sat down on a stone bench, and fell into a musing contemplation of the stained glass oriel, and the long perspective of the pillared aisles. Presently the verger came out of the vestry-room. He was a short, plump, inquisitive-looking man, with a loose black gown, and slender black legs, and a pointed nose. He laid his head on one side, looked at me with one glittering eye, and picked his way daintily across the church towards where I was sitting. Altogether he was very like a raven.

"*Bonjour*, Monsieur," said he, with fluent politeness, and just the sort of croaking voice that suited his general appearance. "Monsieur is a stranger. Monsieur admires the Cathedral. *Bien!* Monsieur has discernment, and the Cathedral is superb. We have nothing finer in France, Monsieur. Our tracery is unique; our nave is admirable; our stained glass is of the first quality, and upwards of six centuries old. Before the high altar of this Cathedral, Mon-

sieur, our good King Louis XII., surnamed the father of his people, married Madame la Princesse Mary of England."

"Yes, and died of gaiety and late hours in less than half-a-year," said I. "A pretty lesson to old gentlemen of seventy-three who marry young ladies of nineteen!"

"*Plait-il?*" croaked the verger, greatly puzzled; for this part of the story was not included in his lesson.

"And have you nothing to show?" I asked. "No remarkable tombs? — no pictures? — no statues?"

The verger fixed a knowing eye upon me, and looked more bird-like than ever.

"The treasury, Monsieur; the episcopal jewels; the relics, the inestimable relics! The great toe of Saint Celestine of Cressy, and the tongs with which St. Dunstan took the devil by the nose. Tickets at two francs each."

"Lead the way," said I, pulling out my two francs: "lead the way, and hand over the ticket. Let us see the inestimable relics!"

But instead of leading the way, he drew back, and hesitated.

"Unfortunately," said he, "the treasury cannot be shown to fewer than five persons. If Monsieur has friends in Abbeville, or if Monsieur has no objection to pay for the five tickets——"

"Pay for five tickets, indeed!" I echoed, indignantly. "Ten francs for St. Dunstan's tongs,

and St. Somebody's toe! I would not buy them at the price!"

The verger shrugged his shoulders, and considered.

"There were two pious pilgrims here this morning," he said, "both devoutly desirous of admission. They will return to-morrow; and, if Monsieur will leave me his address, it is possible that we may be enabled, between this and then, to make up the party."

I scribbled the name of my hotel on the back of my card, left it in his keeping, and wandered out again into the streets.

I cannot say that I was delighted with Abbeville. Mr. Murray did not insist that I should be, and I had left Mr. Bradshaw locked up in my portmanteau. The squares were grass-grown, the canals were foul and weedy, the public buildings were dirty and dilapidated, and the houses all looked as if they had turned their backs to the streets. It may be gloriously picturesque, and I have no doubt that it was a charming town in the estimation of Samuel Prout, Esquire; but, for my own part, I am not enthusiastic about gutters and gables, and object to a population composed exclusively of old women.

I found myself at six o'clock in a desert of dining-room with an oasis of table. I was the only guest. It was a dismal meal; the mouldy waiter attended upon me; and I had bad dreams in the catafalque all night long.

While I was breakfasting the next morning, I

received a message from my friend the verger. Another traveller had turned up; the pilgrims were still anxious for a sight of the relics; and the authorities consented for once to open the treasury-doors in favour of four.

Punctual as I was to the time appointed, the pilgrims were there before me — a pair of stalwart, broad-shouldered, barefooted Capuchins, odorous of garlic and cognac. One had a patch across his eye; the other was lame, and wore a bandage round his ankle. Both kept their hoods well over their faces, and neither was exactly the sort of mendicant that one would prefer to meet towards dusk upon a lonely road among the mountains.

The fourth traveller had not yet arrived; so I returned to the stone seat of yesterday, and the Capuchins paced up and down before the treasury door, conversing in whispers. Thus five — ten — fifteen minutes went by, and the chimes jangled at the quarter.

The pilgrims, who had been glancing up at the clock every half-dozen seconds or so all the time, now grew more and more impatient.

"*Ce diable de voyageur!* will he never come?" was the overloud and somewhat irreverent exclamation of the monk with the patch.

His companion shrugged his shoulders, glanced hurriedly in my direction, and muttered some inaudible reply.

I rose, and went towards them.

"I fear," said I, "that we shall all be disappointed this morning; for the treasury cannot be

seen after midday, and it now wants but twenty minutes to the hour.

The pilgrims groaned, and wagged their heads simultaneously.

"We are poor servants of the church," said the former speaker, crossing himself with great humility. "We are making a pilgrimage to all the *objets saints* of the department. It is a great delay to us, Monsieur — a melancholy delay!"

"And a spiritual privation, Brother Ambroise," added the other, with a profound sigh.

"Aye, a spiritual privation, indeed," echoed Brother Ambroise. "Holy things are meat and drink to miserable sinners such as we."

I murmured a civil assent; but could not help thinking in my own mind that such bulky saints could scarcely be indifferent to meats and drinks of a merely temporal nature.

"Have you been long on this pilgrimage?" I asked, not knowing what next to say.

"Twenty days, Monsieur," replied Brother Ambroise. "Twenty days, during which we have journeyed upon foot, and entirely depended upon the alms of the charitably disposed."

This was a broad hint; but I determined not to observe it.

"Twenty days is a long time," said I. "You must have visited a great many towns, and seen a great many churches, in the course of your journey."

"Oh, a great many — thanks to the holy saints!

a great many," replied the Capuchins, wagging their heads together as before.

"You have been to Amiens, of course?"

They looked at each other, and hesitated.

"Ye — yes, we have been to Amiens," said Brother Ambroise, with another glance at the clock. "And we are on our way to — to —"

"Boulogne," interposed his companion, promptly.

"Exactly so, Brother Paul. To Boulogne — Ah! *les voici!*"

His quick ear had caught the echo of approaching footsteps, and there, sure enough, came the verger, picking his steps up the centre aisle, followed by a slim young gentleman, with fair hair, blue glasses, a note-book, and an umbrella.

The former carried a huge bunch of keys, and proceeded pompously to unlock the treasury door: the latter, who had been the cause of the delay, began murmuring a torrent of explanations and apologies, to which nobody listened. The chimes jangled another quarter — the last bolt was drawn — and in another moment we found ourselves standing in the midst of a large, ill-lighted apartment, surrounded by presses and glass cases, and decorated with a huge black crucifix at the farther end.

"Messieurs — reverend pilgrims," croaked the raven, unlocking press number one, and beginning with a bow to his audience; "you here see the breviary used by his Majesty King Charles X., when he visited our Cathedral in the year 1827, and the cushion pressed by his Majesty's royal knees. Also an embroidered glove worn by his Majesty during

the service, and found near his Majesty's chair, after his Majesty and his Majesty's royal suite had left the church."

"Up — p — pon my word, that's very curious!" ejaculated the slim tourist, who had an impediment in his speech, and was already at work upon the note-book. "I must p — p — put that down. What year did you say — 1527?"

But the raven jingled his keys with dignified indifference, and stalked on to press number two: whereupon 1527 went down as the date of an interesting historical anecdote of the middle ages.

"You now behold," continued he, with a wave of the hand, "the reliquary of St. Celestine de Cressy. This valuable shrine was presented to us in the year 1630, by Monseigneur le Cardinal Richelieu. It is of silver gilt, enriched with precious stones; and measures one foot and a half in length, by eight inches in height. I open the lid, and the object which you perceive enclosed in a small glass box is the most sacred toe of the saint and martyr before-mentioned."

"And what do you suppose it's worth?" asked Brother Ambroise, bending eagerly forward.

"Worth!" croaked the verger, indignantly. "Worth, indeed! Why, 'tis inestimable! Saint Celestine had but one leg at the period of her martyrdom; and that great toe, permit me to tell you, is nothing less than unique!"

"G — g — good gracious!" exclaimed the tourist, scribbling away as fast as his pencil would carry

him. "A saint with one leg, and a lady, too! Wouldn't m — m — m — miss that for the world!"

Press number three was now thrown open, and discovered some four or five shelves, adorned with rich cups, vases, censers, and sacramental vessels. The pilgrims exchanged glances of admiration; the tourist began a fresh page; and the raven flourished his keys more consequentially than ever.

"A cup of rock crystal, with gold cover, supposed to be engraved by Benvenuto Cellini; a statue of St. Barnabas, in solid silver, five inches and a half in height; a very ancient crozier-head, silver gilt; a patera, of antique Byzantine workmanship, enamelled, and of great value. We were offered seven thousand francs for this beautiful work of art, not many years since, but declined to part from it."

The one eye of Brother Ambroise glittered with pious fervour.

"Oh, Brother Paul," said he, emphatically, "is not this a consoling sight? Ought we not to rejoice in the riches of our beloved Church?"

Whereupon Brother Paul cast an enthusiastic glance at the ceiling, struck himself on the breast with both his fists, and said, —

"Aye, indeed, Brother Ambroise; but should we not at the same time be thankful that these things possess no attraction for us? Is it not the glory of our order, that we love poverty better than riches, fasting better than feasting, and wooden platters better than all the gold and silver vessels in the world?"

"Verily we do!" responded Brother Ambroise with a groan of humble satisfaction. "Verily we do!"

Here the verger, who had been listening with his head on one side, drew a deep sigh of admiration, and with especial ceremony unlocked press number four.

"You are now about to see the greatest treasure that we possess," said he; "the crowning glory of our collection, Messieurs — the pride of Abbeville — the envy and delight of surrounding districts!"

The Capuchins uttered a simultaneous "Ah!" and pressed to the front. The raven flung open the doors, pointed to a shapeless fragment of rusty iron reposing on a crimson velvet cushion, fell into an attitude, and in a tone of modest triumph announced —

"The tongs with which St. Dunstan took the devil by the nose!"

The pilgrims drew back in silence. It might be my profane fancy; but they certainly looked disappointed. Not so the energetic tourist. He protested that the thing was "m — m — marvellous!" and entreated five minutes delay, to make a sketch of the interesting object.

The verger consented, a chair was brought, and the artist began.

"If I had but a piece of India-rubber and a d — d — double B!" sighed he.

"I think," observed Brother Paul with great alacrity, "that the gentleman should have more light!

would it not be possible, my son, to draw that blind higher?"

The verger, thus paternally addressed, deposited his keys on the table, muttered something about "notions," mounted a little set of library steps, and complied. At that instant Brother Paul was seized with a violent fit of coughing, and Brother Ambroise, passing beside the table, took the keys up carelessly in his hand.

The blind was obstinate, and, instead of going up, came down with a run. When it was at last arranged, the Cathedral bell was ringing for service, and long before the tourist had shaded his sketch to his own satisfaction, the verger declared that we could stay no longer.

"Let us return thanks to our patron saint, Brother Ambroise!" ejaculated the lame pilgrim; "for our replenishment of spirit has been great."

Whereupon Brother Ambroise devoutly kissed and returned the keys, and gave the verger his blessing.

It was a cheap donation, and neither my stammering countryman nor I got off so easily. The people were assembling for mass as we went out. The Capuchins went one way — the stranger and I another. He was all admiration of what he had seen, what he had not seen, and what he was going to see.

"B — b — beautiful country!" said he. "B — b — beautiful churches — interesting nation! I'm going to P — P — Paris to-morrow."

"Ah," said I with a yawn — "you'll be delighted with Paris."

"I know I shall," replied he. "I'm going to write a b—b—book about it. Good morning!"

"Good morning," said I, and returned to mine inn to breakfast.

Sitting over that desolate meal, I asked myself what was next to be done? Abbeville was "used up." I had seen the Cathedral, and I had seen the town, and even Mr. Murray confessed that the tourist could do no more. I had also an objection to pass another night in the catafalque. To go I had determined; but the question was — where? In this emergency I recollected that I had not yet consulted Mr. Bradshaw, so I sought out the "Continental Railway Guide" from the substrata of my portmanteau, turned to page 185, and read as follows: —

"ABBEVILLE. — A fortified town, containing about 18000 inhabitants, situated on the river Somme, twelve miles from the beautiful and picturesque town of St. Valery-sur-Somme."

"'The beautiful and picturesque town of St. Valery-sur-Somme!" I repeated, aloud. "Why, 'tis the very thing! Blessed be the name of Bradshaw — I'll go this afternoon! Waiter — kellner — garçon! What conveyances are there to St. Valery-sur-Somme?"

"To St. Valery?" repeated the waiter, regarding me with an air of melancholy surprise. "Monsieur is going to St. Valery?"

I nodded impatiently.

"Monsieur has friends at St. Valery?"

"Friends! not I."

"Business, perhaps?"

"No — nor business either. I'm going for pleasure — to see the place. How does that concern you, pray?"

The waiter shrugged his shoulders apologetically.

"*Je vous demande pardon, M'sieur.* I — I but inquired. There is nothing to see at St. Valery, M'sieur. Nothing whatever. But M'sieur is the best judge."

I cast an affectionate eye at the "Continental Railway Guide," page 185.

"Nothing to see, indeed!" said I, with quiet triumph. "There are the beauties of nature — there is a picturesque old town — there is exquisite sketching. Bah! I should not wonder if I stayed there till the end of the month!"

The waiter looked down incredulously, and the dismallest ghost of a smile flitted across his countenance. It was evident that *he* had no soul for the picturesque!

"As Monsieur pleases," said he, submissively. "Monsieur was enquiring . . ."

"About the conveyances! Well?"

"Well, Monsieur, there is a passage-boat daily, by the river. That goes at midday. There is also a *cabriolet de poste*. That goes at ten o'clock every morning."

"And there is nothing going this afternoon?"

"Nothing; unless Monsieur chooses a *voiture*

particulière. We have an excellent travelling carriage at Monsieur's disposal."

Having, however, no fancy for a trip *en grand seigneur*, I decided to wait till to-morrow; and so went out to inquire into the comparative merits of the passage-boat and the cabriolet.

There was something very refreshing in the idea of a water journey.

I recalled all my joyous boatings up the Medway and the Thames; my adventures on the Rhine and the Moselle; my feats and failures on the Cam in college days long since gone by; and thus pleasantly running over my "rambles by rivers," made my way towards that part of the Somme called the *Rive des Bateaux.*

It was a dismal spot just within the fortifications. To the left lay the city; to the right, high embankments, a drawbridge, a stretch of flat country, and a long perspective of canal-like river bordered by files of monotonous poplars. The first object that met my eyes was the passage-boat moored up beside a tiny wooden landing-place. It was a heavy, square-built, green and yellow boat, with a dirty little pavilion at the poop. The interior of this pavilion was furnished with benches, and lit by a row of little windows all the way round. On a shelf of deck near the prow sat some three or four grimy men, cooking their dinner over a brazier; and between this shelf and the pavilion the boat was laden with wood, hay, charcoal, and market produce. Altogether it was by no means an inviting conveyance, and looked more like a coal

barge with a shabby omnibus on deck than anything else that I can think of.

While I was yet observing these things, a fat official, with a gold band to his cap, rolled lazily out of a little red bureau attached to the quay, and hung out a tariff of the tolls and rates of conveyance.

"Pray when does this boat leave," I asked; "and how long does it take to go from here to St. Valery?"

The fat official brought a huge cigar out of his pocket, stabbed it deliberately with a pin in two places, and stuck it in his mouth before replying.

"Starts at midday *précis*," said he. "Arrives between six and seven."

"Six hours to travel twelve miles!" I exclaimed. "Surely there must be some mistake!"

"Fourteen miles by the river," replied he, phlegmatically. "Nine stations."

"And the fare?"

"Pavilion, seven francs; deck, four."

I hesitated, looked again at the boat, and thought it uglier and more uncomfortable than before.

"And is the scenery interesting?" I inquired, presently.

"*Plaît-il?*" said the fat official, looking somewhat puzzled.

"The — the river, you know! Is it pretty? Is there anything to see?"

He sucked silently at his cigar, turned a fishy

eye upon me, stared languidly up the stream and down the stream, and finally pointed with his thumb towards the perspective of poplars.

"*C'est bien*," said he, with placid satisfaction; "*c'est très bien, cette rivière-ci.* It is just like this all the way."

"Just like this all the way!" I repeated, drawing a deep breath. "*In*-deed! Then I wish you a very good day."

The official touched his cap with one finger, and closed his eyes, which was the nearest approach to a bow that he could take the trouble to make. Whereupon we parted — that is to say, he remained where he was, and I strode indignantly away.

"I will go by the *cabriolet de poste*," I muttered to myself, as I went along. "I shall go early, and I shall go quickly, and I dare say the road is delightful!"

The *Bureau des Messageries* was just opposite my hotel, and the office was occupied by a very pretty young girl, a cat, and a canary. I took off my hat, and was greeted with a smile and a curtsey.

"Will Mademoiselle be so kind as to inform me of the earliest departure for St. Valery?" I asked, with my best French air and accent.

"The *cabriolet* leaves at ten to-morrow morning, and the fare is eleven francs," replied the young lady, with great politeness.

I laid the money on the table. She entered

my name in the ledger, and handed me a small green ticket.

"Mademoiselle is acquainted with St. Valery?" I ventured timidly to inquire.

Mademoiselle looked down, coquetted with the corner of her apron, and admitted that she had frequently visited the place in question.

"And Mademoiselle was pleased with the town — found it picturesque and agreeable?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and arched her eyebrows as only a Frenchwoman can.

"*Ma foi! non*, Monsieur," said she. "It is *triste* — miserably *triste!*"

"By *triste*," said I, "you would imply retired; but a place may be retired and very lovely at the same time. I have heard that St. Valery is charming."

"*Vraiment?*"

"Ah, Mademoiselle is of a different opinion!"

She smiled, and shook her head with the air of a person who is too polite to offer a contradiction.

"*Pardon*," said she. "I do not doubt that Monsieur's information is correct. Tastes are so different!"

"And appearances so deceptive," added I to myself, as I walked out of the bureau. "That girl is pretty and vivacious; but she has no mind. After all, however, one need never hope to find localities appreciated by those who live upon the spot. The Romans quarried the Coliseum for building materials; and the boatmen who rowed me from Geneva

to Versoix could not tell me the name of Mont Blanc!"

And so the rest of that day went drearily by, and I hated Abbeville, and despised the natives, and loathed the hotel *Tête de Bœuf*, and wearied of the waiter, and almost lost my faith in human nature.

— Bradshaw excepted! Bradshaw to whom I trusted for to-morrow morning's deliverance — Bradshaw whom I never doubted for an instant — Bradshaw the inestimable — Bradshaw the veracious — Bradshaw the . . . . . Well I won't mind that just at present!

The resignation with which I dined in the desert, and retired once more to rest beneath the funereal amber satin draperies of the catafalque; the cheerful alacrity with which I rose the next morning; and the benevolent frame of mind in which I discharged my bill, and feed the melancholy waiter, can never be described. At a quarter to ten o'clock I despatched my luggage to the bureau, and at ten precisely I followed it.

It was market-day, and the space in front of the hotel was lined with stalls, and thronged with noisy peasants. Stacks of fruit and vegetables obstructed the pavement; rude barrows and *charrettes* blocked up the roadway; the population of old women seemed to have been multiplied by twenty; and high above all the noise and bustle jangled the perpetual chimes. I crossed the street with difficulty, and in the midst of this confusion looked round in search of the *cabriolet de poste*. Save the barrows, the *charrettes*,

and one yellow dilapidated, weather-beaten, perilous-looking cart, with a penthouse roof and a patched leather apron, standing at the corner of the street, there was no kind of conveyance in sight. I wandered into the stableyard of the bureau, but found it empty. I peeped into the office, but saw only the canary. I grew nervous. I began to fear that I had mistaken the hour, and that the *courier* had started without me. In this emergency I addressed myself to a sunburnt stripling who was lolling on a bench outside the door with a pipe in his mouth, and a short thong-whip across his knees. He looked about sixteen, was very shabby and ragged, wore *sabots* and no stockings, and had little gold rings in his ears.

"Can you tell me," said I, "if the *cabriolet* has started?"

"Will start as soon as ever the letters come up from the station," said he, pointing with his pipe to the cart at the corner. "There it stands."

"That rickety old *charrette!*" I exclaimed. "That the government mail! Impossible!"

The boy grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll complain to the authorities," I continued, indignantly. "Eleven francs to ride twelve miles in such a wretched concern as that! Why, it's an imposition; and — and — where can I find the *courier?*"

The boy knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"I am the *courier*," said he, very coolly; "and if you're the passenger for St. Valery, you'd better take your seat; for here come the letters."

As he spoke, the railway omnibus rumbled round

the corner. I had no resource but to obey; so I scrambled up as best I could, and found myself condemned to a cushionless bench about six inches in width, and the society of a very little boy with the hooping cough. In another moment the letter-bag was tossed in — the *gamin courier* seized the reins, uttered a wild whoop, and sprang upon the shafts — the omnibus-driver favoured us with a cut of his whip — the idlers gave a delighted shout — the old market-women scrambled out of the way — and off we rattled at full speed over the stones.

Whoop! Sacr-r-r-r-re! the *gamin* flourishes his whip — the harness-bells jingle — the hotel *Tête de Bœuf* is left far behind — and the grey old mountainous Cathedral is out of sight in no time.

Whoop! Sacr-r-r-r-re! Through the market-place — up one street, down another, and over a dangerous old wooden bridge that groans and creaks beneath our wheels! Now we pass the boundary of the fortifications, and enter upon a dreary, straggling suburb, that seems to get longer the further we go; and now, as we draw near the barrier where he must pause for the "*visite*," our charioteer subsides into a state of comparative tranquillity, and our speed slackens. The presentation of a paper, the peering in of a mustachioed gendarme, and the perilous introduction of a bayonet close beside my legs, constitutes the "*visite*;" after which we go on at a much slower pace than before.

We are now in the open country, and jogging along a straight sandy road, bordered by poplars and pollards — the very twin brother to the un-

inviting canal of yesterday. The country round is wide and waste, and the little farmhouses are scattered thinly here and there. Sometimes we pass a wagon with the driver dozing in his place — sometimes a country girl in a cloak and hood, or a weather-beaten old *cantonnier* at work upon the road. The heat becomes almost intolerable, and before we have travelled a couple of miles we are powdered over with a fine white dust that is especially tormenting. Then the little boy drops off into an uneasy sleep, and has to be propped up with my portmanteau; and the *gamin*, who is taking it very easily just now, and allowing the horse to go at his own pace, dangles his legs lazily to and fro, lights his pipe, pulls out a wellworn and very greasy-looking letter, and begins to read. He continues in this state of quiescence for a mile or more, till the drowsy influences of the scene begin to tell upon myself. Then, just as I also am beginning to nod, he starts into a state of frantic animation, yells, cracks his whip, urges his horse to a shambling gallop, plunges round the corner of the road and through the main street of a village that has hitherto lain unseen behind the hill, and so pulls up before the door of the single *auberge*, with the air of one who has driven hard all the way, and exhausted himself in the service of an ungrateful government.

Thus, at an intermittent pace which is alternately furious or funereal according as we approach a village or traverse a lonely country road, we journey on our way. By-and-by the landscape grows more and more desolate; the heat more and more oppressive.

Dreary sandhills and undulating sweeps of furzy common succeed to the fields and farms about Abbeville. Habitations become fewer and farther between. Vegetation almost ceases. The horse's feet sink deep at every step, and the drifting sand-dust swirls up in our faces with every hot gust of the north-east wind.

We have been four hours and a half upon the road already; it is close upon three o'clock; and a long hill glares before us in the sun.

"From the top yonder," says the *gamin* composedly, "we shall come in sight of the sea."

"The sea! Is St. Valery near the sea?"

"*Mais certainement.* Did not Monsieur know that?"

I did not know it; and I am not pleased to know it. I am not fond of the sea-side. I hate bathing. I am not clever at coast scenery, and I never could draw a boat in my life. Altogether I begin to have misgivings on the subject of what I have come to see; and when we do reach the top of the hill and I catch a glimpse of that glittering line that bounds the horizon like a silver scimitar, I turn away mine eyes in disgust, and feign a sulky sleep.

The feigned sleep merges insensibly into a real one, from which I am by-and-by awakened by more yelling and whooping on the part of the driver, by the headlong jolting of the *cabriolet*, and by the transition from a soft dusty road to the rough pavement of a town.

It is a street bordered by houses on one side and

a quay on the other. The houses are of the poorest, and the population of the shabbiest description. The town consists of a single irregular street, about a mile in length, and the prevailing trade appears to be in cockles and cordage. At the farther extremity, on a little sandy eminence, stands a small grey-steepled church, surmounted by a forlorn wooden telegraph that has long fallen into disuse, and still points upwards with one lank arm, like a skeleton of ill-omen. The river at this point almost ceases to be a river, and widens out between low sandy banks to its junction with the sea. The opposite shore is so far distant that only the ghostly outline of a lighthouse and some trees is visible; and between that shore and St. Valery stretches such a dreary waste of mud, slime, and sand as I have never seen in my life before or since. Imagine the mouth of the Nore with the tide out and all the water gone, save a narrow current which ripples along a groove in the midst of the river-bed, and you will at least have formed some vague notion of the aspect of St. Valery at low water.

Moored beside the quays, or hauled up high and dry on the banks farther down, lie merchant-vessels, barks, and fishing-boats, of various builds and sizes. Some are undergoing repairs; some are being laden, some unladen; and round about them all, in every stage of idleness or activity, swarm scores of rough, weatherbeaten seamen, with big boots, Guernsey shirts, and little gold rings in their brown ears.

Seeing, but scarcely noting these things at the moment, I am jolted along, between the ships and

the houses, and set down, half awake, before the door of an inn. It is but a mean *auberge*, though the best in the place, and it bears the sign of the *Lion d'Or*. I turn to the waiter, who lolls carelessly against the door, and signify my intention of remaining for the night. But he, instead of responding with that cheerful alacrity which one is accustomed to expect, only shakes his head, and surveys me and my luggage with superb indifference.

"Our rooms," says he, loftily, "are all engaged. Monsieur will probably find accommodation at the *Couronne*."

This is discouraging; but I compromise the matter by arranging to dine at the *Lion d'Or* at six o'clock, even though I have to seek a bed elsewhere. Hereupon the waiter unbends, the *gamin* gets his *pourboire*, the cabriolet clatters away at full speed; and, after a brief rest and hasty lunch, I stroll out to see the town, and beat up my quarters at the *Couronne*.

Alas! the *Couronne* was an *auberge* infinitely smaller, meaner, and dirtier than the *Lion d'Or*, situated close behind the strand, at some distance from the quays. There was a gaunt flagstaff planted in the dreary little garden at the back, and a pile of shells, broken bottles, and vegetable refuse before the door. The public room was full of seafaring men — the landlord himself looked like a retired smuggler — the atmosphere of the house was suggestive of tar, tobacco, and cognac — and there was a tiny model of a frigate over the fireplace of the tap-room. Altogether *La Couronne* was about the

last inn in France which I should voluntarily have chosen for a night's lodging; but there was no help for it.

Here, then, I found myself forced to apply for accommodation. The landlord was too busy with his customers to attend to me, and the landlady referred me to a deaf old *fille de chambre*, as withered and weird as one of Macbeth's witches.

"A bed?" said she, peering and blinking in my face, and holding one hand hollowed over her ear. "Ay, to be sure! Two, if you please — two, if you please!"

"*Merci*, one will be enough. Can I see the room?"

She nodded, stumped upstairs slowly before me, in her heavy *sabots*, and led the way into a large, cold, comfortless chamber, which contained two beds, and looked as if it had not been occupied for months.

"Have you no other room than this?" I asked, shivering.

"Yes, it is rather chilly," mumbled the *fille de chambre*; "but Monsieur can have a fire in the stove."

"Very well," said I, resignedly; "I shall be in about nine or ten o'clock."

"Three francs a night, and fifty centimes for attendance. Does Monsieur prefer the bed next the door, or the bed next the fire?"

"Either: if I have but the room to myself. Remember, if you please, that I pay for both these beds."

"Good: the bed next the door. Monsieur may rely upon it that everything shall be as comfortable as possible." And the old woman blinked cunningly to herself, in the full persuasion that she had not betrayed her deafness by a single blunder.

More disconsolate than ever, I parted from her with a nod and a trifling gratuity, and made my way out as quickly as I could, turning my face inland, and leaving the town at my back. But landwards or seawards, it was all dreary alike! A boat-building yard; a weir; the mouth of another poplar-bound canal; a few heavy, round-shouldered trading smacks lying up sideways on the slimy shore; a knot of barefooted women washing linen; a rope-walk; another miserable *cabaret*; and a cluster of fishermen's hovels . . . . these were all the sights and incidents that I beheld by the way. I went up to the weir, and sat down upon a line of stone parapet. I looked to the right — land, sand, poplars, a canal, and universal flatness! I looked to the left — strand, sand, mud, houses, boats, and universal flatness! I thought of Abbeville with tender regret; I sighed for the hotel *Tête de Bœuf*; I could have embraced the mouldy waiter! Then — then I turned to Bradshaw, Bradshaw the betrayer, and upbraided him bitterly.

"Is this," I exclaimed, opening the "Continental Railway Guide," page 185, "is this 'the beautiful and picturesque town of St. Valery-sur-Somme,' which you, and you alone, O faithless one! have induced me to visit?

Oh, Bradshaw! I believed thee true,
And I was blest in so believing;
But now I mourn . . . . ."

I broke off abruptly. My feelings would not allow me to continue; and as it was by this time approaching six o'clock, I rose and went back moodily to dinner.

I have no wish to preserve either a record or a recollection of that dismal meal; but surely that bill of sixteen francs must lie heavily upon the conscience of mine host of the *Lion d'Or!*

A bottle of indifferent Bordeaux; a copy of the '*Moniteur*' four days old; a couple of cigars; and a pleasant game at billiards in the public room, with an intelligent young Breton, who told me that he was a commercial traveller, helped to pass away the remainder of the evening, and, for a while, to divert my attention from the subject of my night's lodging. As the hours progressed, however, I could not help thinking of it, and the later it grew the more reluctant I became. The truth was that I had taken an almost childish aversion, not only to my room at the *Couronne*, but to the situation of the inn itself, to its landlord, its frequenters, and its ancient *fille de chambre.* I reasoned with myself in vain; the feeling was strong upon me, and at eleven o'clock, when my new acquaintance bade me good night, and the rest of the guests dispersed, I had more than a half a mind to pass the night upon a sofa at the *Lion d'Or*, and have nothing whatever to say to the room which I had already engaged. But I was

ashamed to confess my weakness, and so the condescending waiter bowed me out.

The moon had now risen, and the tide was coming in fast. Already the narrow current had expanded into a broad, shining stream; and some of the farthest boats, which in the afternoon had lain sprawling on the mud like stranded whales, were riding buoyantly at anchor. The night was lovely, and I would fain have lingered out for some time longer, but that I feared to find the doors of mine inn closed against me. It was a needless precaution. The night-trade of *La Couronne* seemed to be in even a more flourishing state than that of the day; and what with the singing, and laughter, and smoking that was going on in the taproom, I could find no one to attend to me, so quietly possessed myself of a candle and stole up to my room.

The fire had been lighted, and was almost out, and the chamber looked almost as comfortless as ever. My first proceeding was to lock myself in; but the key was rusty and would not turn, and there was no bolt anywhere: my next was to draw the blinds, pile more wood upon the embers, and make myself as comfortable as circumstances would allow. It was a long time before I could overcome my uneasiness sufficiently to go to bed, and even then I only took my boots and cravat off, and lay down in my clothes.

A lonely waterside inn — a gang of riotous revellers — a door that could not be secured! Do what I would, I could not keep from thinking of this; or, if I did succeed for a few moments, it was

only to dwell upon something still worse. I recalled all the dreadful tales I had ever read, or heard, of double-bedded rooms, and midnight murders, and unknown bodies drifted out to sea. I recollected one story of a bed that sank through the floor, and another of a bed that smothered its occupant by means of a descending tester. I wondered if anybody had ever died in this one, or if, by the flickering fire-light, I should presently see a pale face staring at me from between the curtains of the other. In short, I was thoroughly nervous, and had suffered my imagination to run upon ghosts, "deadly murder, spoil, and villany," till at last I was fain to draw the counterpane over my head, and count scores of imaginary sheep till I fell asleep.

I dreamt; but except that it was painful and confused, I have no recollection of my dream. Neither do I know how long I slept. It may have been but a few minutes, and it may have been an hour; but when I woke, it was with an instantaneous summoning of all my self-possession, and with the consciousness of a human presence in the room. To lie quite motionless, and leave the counterpane still shrouding up my head and face was the result of my first impulse — to listen breathlessly, my second.

A heavy footstep crossing the floor — a candle set down roughly on the table — the drawing up of a chair beside the fire — and a prolonged yawn, convinced me that the intruder was alone. Presently he threw a fresh log on the fire, and soon after that an odour of coarse tobacco filled the room.

At this point, having overcome my first terrors, I felt a strong inclination to make known my presence; but, somehow, I hesitated, and, half in curiosity, half in apprehension, lay still and listened.

Thus a quarter of an hour or more went by, and some revellers from the inn parlour went out, singing, and shouted a noisy farewell to those who remained behind. Then a clock struck on the landing, and my unknown visitor, after shuffling restlessly in his place, got up, and paced to and fro between the window and the door. By-and-by he opened the casement, and leaned out; whereupon I ventured to lift a corner of the quilt; for what with the mildness of the night, the heat of the fire, and the oppressive closeness of my concealment, I was almost smothered. A breath of cool air, however, and one glimpse of a bulky, broad-shouldered man in a loose pea-coat and woollen cap, was all that I could obtain. Scarcely had he looked out when he exchanged a hurried greeting with some one down below.

"Come up," I heard him say. "Come up. All's safe here!"

With this he closed the window — I cowered down beneath the counterpane — a second heavy footfall came creaking up the stairs, and another man entered the room.

"All right?" asked the first comer, eagerly; and, strange to say, I seemed to have heard his voice before.

"All right," replied the other, depositing some heavy burthen on the floor, and drawing a deep

breath of relief. "But I've had to walk more than a mile, *et ça pèse comme le diable!*"

"And you met no one?"

"*Parbleu!* I came face to face with a *sergent de ville* just against the landing-place yonder; but I touched my cap, and he said 'Good night,' and I went my way, and he went his. There's nothing to fear, if we can only drop out to sea before day-break!"

"Yes — but it wants an hour still to high tide, and they've moored her so close in shore that only the high tide will float her! Cursed fools that they were!"

"And we must wait here another hour?"

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!* there's no help for it!"

The new comer struck the table heavily with his fist, and muttered a string of oaths, half of which were wholly unintelligible to me. Somehow, his voice, as well as his companion's, struck upon my ear with a familiarity that urged my curiosity to the keenest pitch. If I might only trust to the gloom of this part of the room, and venture on another peep! Just as I was about to dare it, the second stranger spoke again.

"Have you nothing to drink?" said he, moodily.

"Drink!" echoed the other; "I should think so, indeed! why, mate, here's a flask of the real old Schiedam, if that will content you!"

A growl of satisfaction, a deep-drawn breath, and a hearty smack of the lips, was the reply that followed. I could resist no longer. I drew the

quilt down gently to the level of my eyes, held my breath, and looked out.

They were both seafaring men, and the second wore much the same kind of dress as the first — a costume which is conventionally adopted by stage-smugglers, but which in actual life is chiefly confined to the seamen of French and Dutch trading smacks, and to our own north-coast fishers. The first comer sat with his back to me; but the other, who was now returning the flask across the table, had his face turned straight towards me. It was a tawny, sullen countenance, and one that I felt certain I had seen before. When had we met, though? And where? These were difficult questions, and the longer I looked, the more I became puzzled to answer them. It was like a face seen in a dream, but only half remembered — strange, and yet familiar — like and unlike at the same time!

I was not long left in doubt, however; for his companion took the flask, held it to the light to see how much of the liquor was gone; nodded solemnly, and said; "Here's to your spiritual glorification, Brother Ambroise!" and drank a deep draught out of the bottle!

This sally evoked a hoarse laugh from both, under cover of which I ventured to shift my position, so as to conceal myself still more effectually. These, then, were my friends the pious pilgrims of the day before yesterday! I recognised them well enough now — Brother Paul was the first, and Brother Ambroise, who had miraculously recovered the sight of his left eye, was the second. I am

bound to confess that this discovery affected me with a very unpleasant sensation all down my back, and caused a rushing noise in my ears that obliterated for some seconds every other sound.

When I next looked up, Paul was bending eagerly forward, and Ambroise was lifting a carpet-bag from the floor to the table.

"If the *sergent de ville* had asked to see what was in this," said he, unbuckling the straps at the mouth of the bag, "I should not have wished him good night quite so civilly!"

"What would you have done?" inquired Paul, with a grim chuckle.

"Brained him," was the brief but significant reply.

I turned cold all over.

The last buckle was now undone. Ambroise plunged in his arm, and brought out a silver cup.

"That's worth having," said Paul, weighing it in his hand with the air of a connoisseur; "and the Schiedam would taste well out of it — eh, mate?"

"Better out of this," growled the other, producing a superb gold tazza with a jewelled lid. "Diable! how that red stone sparkles at the top!"

He held it at arm's length, admiringly, till his companion lost patience, and snatched it from his hand.

"Go on, can't you!" said he sharply. "What comes next? Where's the gold box? That's the best of the lot, and I put it in myself while you

were after the candlesticks. Hah! there it is — there it is! Set it on the table."

My head swam — I could not believe my eyes! Was it — yes, it was indeed the precious shrine of St. Celestine de Cressy, presented in 1630 by Cardinal Richelieu!

I understood it all now — remembered all, even to the manner in which the verger's keys had been handled by Brother Ambroise. They had robbed the Cathedral!

"Well, what next?"

"Nothing now," said Ambroise gruffly, sweeping the cups back into the bag and packing away the shrine on the top of them. "The tide must be up by this time, and — *Holà!* whose boots are these?"

"Boots!" exclaimed the other, who had gone over to the window. "Boots! What do you mean?"

"Mean!" echoed Ambroise, snatching the candle from the table, and crossing the room at a single bound. "Death of my life! there's a man in the bed!"

As long as I live I shall never forget the horror of that moment. To keep my eyes closed, to regulate the rising and falling of my breath, and to preserve an utterly passive expression of face and attitude, was the result of an instinct beyond myself. My power of thought was for the moment annihilated; and I feigned sleep as the spider feigns death, almost without knowing how or why I did it.

"He's asleep," said Paul.

"He's acting," said Ambroise, and flashed the candle before my eyes.

Not a nerve quivered. I seemed endued with a supernatural mastery over every fibre of my frame, and never flinched, though the effort was agony.

"It's very well done," said Ambroise, between his teeth; "but it's not real. No man could have slept through the noise we've made."

"Yes he could, if he'd been drinking," replied Paul. "Don't you see he has gone to bed in his clothes, and isn't that a proof of the state he was in when he came up?"

"Proof or no proof," said Ambroise, with a terrible imprecation, "I'll —"

He broke off abruptly, and I heard a click, like the opening of a clasp-knife.

At this moment I gave myself up for lost, and a dead cold gathered at my heart. Then Paul interposed again.

"Give me the knife," I heard him say. "I'll test him, and then ..."

His voice dropped to a whisper; there was a muttered argument; a pause; a moment of maddening suspense! Then the quilt was pulled back, a hot breath ruffled the hair upon my brow, and a keen, cold, deadly edge, fine as the edge of a razor, was drawn slowly across my throat.

The quiver of an eyelid, the flutter of a breath would have betrayed me; but the love of life was stronger than the fear of death, and, thank God! I lay passive and placid as before.

Paul burst into a loud laugh, and tossed the knife back to its owner.

"*Ivre-mort, pardieu!*" said he. "I'd as soon suspect the walls of listening!"

Ambroise muttered an angry oath, and turned away.

"You're too easy," he said, sullenly. "There's nothing like a dead man's tongue to keep a secret!"

At this moment, a long shrill whistle echoed under the window, like the wail of a Banshee.

"The signal," cried both, in a breath. Ambroise shouldered the bag; the light was blown out; in their eagerness to be gone all else was forgotten; and the next instant I heard their footsteps tramping down the stairs!

* * * * * *

The story of the robbery at Abbeville needs no further repetition from my pen; but to those who are not familiar with the particulars it may be interesting to add that none of the stolen treasure was ever recovered, and neither of the dexterous pilgrims seen or heard of more. The robbery was committed on the evening of their flight, and of my trying adventure at St. Valery. It was supposed to have been done about nine o'clock. The church was entered from a window overlooking a patch of waste ground beside the canal — a spot of which I still have a sketch in my possession. The keys by which they unlocked the presses were found in the corridor close by; and a locksmith living somewhere in the suburbs of the town testified to having innocently manufactured them from some wax impressions intrusted to him by two holy pilgrims, one of whom was lame, and the other blind of an eye. From the

description which I was enabled to give of both these individuals, it was conjectured that they were two brothers of the name of Carpeaux, natives of Hâvre, who had been more than once convicted of petty misdemeanours, and were supposed of late years to be connected with the coast-smuggling of France and Holland. Whether they prospered on their sacrilegious gains, time and chance can alone determine. For my part, I expect that they will come to the galleys some day, and that we shall then hear more about them.

In the meantime, suffer me, O Reader, to whisper a word of advice at parting. If thou art at home, by all means stay there. It is the safest and happiest place in the world, depend on it. But if, like me, thou hast the Continental mania, then do as I do. Believe in Mr. Murray — never try to find out anything for yourself — and avoid Bradshaw the Betrayer!

CHAPTER VII.

TWO NEW-YEAR'S DAYS.

I AM the organist of St. Martha-cum-Silvermere, a little quiet church, in a little quiet town, some five-and-forty miles north-east of London. It is not a very brilliant appointment — thirty pounds a year, and a small old-fashioned house to live in. But I can exist upon it. I have a few pupils; a gratuity from the Vestry on Christmas-Day and Good Friday; and, above all, a sincere love for my art. Besides, do I not posses a first-class certificate of merit from the Musical Academy of Zollenstrasse, in the Duchy of Zollenstrasse-am-Main, where I received my professional education? Do I not rejoice in the possession of that famous complimentary letter addressed to me by the wife of the Town-Councillor Von Stumpf? Am I not the proud and fortunate competitor who carried off those two bronze medals, and that faded laurel-wreath, which were awarded at the three grand examinations, and which now adorn the mantelshelf of my little parlour?

The worst part of it is, that I have no one to whom I can show these trophies excepting my little pupils, and my child-servant. I am very lonely. How it happens that I possess no friends or kindred in all my native England is of no importance here. My residence abroad, and my foreign education,

have something to do with the matter, and .... But I will not enter upon that subject. It is painful to look back upon a home and social circle broken up — upon a sunny childhood faded — upon parents lost, but unforgotten: and, moreover, these things have absolutely nothing to do with my story.

Yes, I am lonely; and, for one still warm of heart, it seems a strange, cold fate enough. Yet my life is not without its pleasures. I like my little church, with its carven tombs, and Gothic crypt, and monumental brasses. I am interested in the aged sexton, and in his long, prosy tales of the De Lacy family, whose tattered banner hangs above the old oak sculpture near the altar-rails. I am attached to the little, rosy-faced rustics of the Sunday-school, who come every Wednesday to the Church, that I may train their sweet infant voices in those chants and psalm-tunes which they sing during the services of the Sabbath. Above all, I love my quaint old organ, up in the dark nook over the church door. I love its triple row of black keys, its obsolete stops, its curiously-carved music desk, and the little gilded angels with trumpets and violoncellos which are perched so uneasily on the top, and "pipe to the spirit-ditties of no tone."

It is true that the organ is not perfect; nay, I must confess that it is, in many respects, a somewhat eccentric instrument. There is a trumpet-stop in the great organ which always plays a tone and a half too high, and which I have not dared to use for the last two years. The pedals are so worn down by the friction of more than a century, that they are

reduced to the thinness of laths, and many of them are dumb. And there is something odd the matter with the bellows, so that the wind comes with a puffy, intermittent sound, as if the organ were asthmatic — a defect which is peculiarly annoying, as it makes the children laugh, and spoils the effect of my most brilliant passages. However, I am a constant little woman in my attachments, and I love the organ dearly for all that.

Silvermere is a very pleasant place in the summer time; and, though I always find plenty to occupy my time and my thoughts, I certainly feel happier then than during any other period of the year. I have my walks in the fields and by the river side; my long practices in the empty church, when the mellow evening sunlight comes streaming through the oriel window, and glinting all along the pillared aisle; my garden to cultivate; and my little vases on the chimney-piece all filled with fresh, sweet flowers. But sometimes I find the winters linger very drearily. Mind, I do not complain. I have my books and my fireside, and many, many comforts, for which I am grateful; yet the long, dark evenings do seem heavy to me at times, and the brightest fire loses half its cheerfulness when one has to sit by it alone. Of all days in the year, New-Year's-day seems the loneliest and dreariest to me. I had been accustomed, while in Germany, to see this anniversary merrily celebrated, and had borne my share in the gifts, good wishes, balls, and pleasant social festivities with which the Germans usher in the great Birthday and the new-born year.

It is no wonder I should now feel sad when all Silvermere is gay; when London friends come down to spend their winter holidays with our townsfolk; when joyous parties are taking place night after night all around me; and I alone receive no loving smiles, no gentle greetings from any human creature.

It seems strange that none of the inhabitants of this town have noticed or befriended me. The Rector is always kind, but his wife is far too haughty to speak to me; and the rest of our little aristocracy, the lawyer's, doctor's, and squire's families follow her example. With the tradespeople I am, in my turn, too proud to associate; and thus I have neither friend nor acquaintance. I know that I am not a prepossessing person. I have not the gift of pleasing where I choose. I am silent, and distant, and plain; but oh! I know how full my heart is of love and charity, and how it yearns for something to lean upon and cherish! But there are none who care to read that heart, and none for it to love.

But it was not always thus — there was once....

It was a long time ago. I had been about four years in England, and scarcely two at Silvermere. I was quite young then, and not so plain, and pale, and taciturn as I am now. The organ, too, was not so asthmatic as it is at present.

I saw him first at church. How well I remember it! It was towards the autumn. The weather was gloriously beautiful; and the days were so long and calm that life seemed twice its usual length. The afternoon service was just about to commence — in fact, I was playing the opening voluntary — when

one of the school children stole round softly to my elbow, and whispered: —

"Please, ma'am, there's a strange gentleman in the church!"

A stranger amid a country congregation is an event, and an important one. He attracts more attention than the sermon, and, in the eyes of the children, eclipses the beadle himself.

It was my duty to keep the little urchins in order, so I shook my head gravely, and said, "Hush! don't talk in church," and went on with my voluntary.

"Please, ma'am, he looks like a Frenchman, or — or a Turk!"

This last suggestion was hazarded dubiously, and followed by a peep between the faded curtains that hid me from the congregation. Now a peep between the curtains was a liberty, and an act of insubordination which I never would permit; so I turned round very sharply, and tried to assume an exceedingly angry countenance.

"Sarah Wilson," I said to the offender, "go back to your place directly, and pay attention to the service. It is of no consequence to you who is, or is not, in the church!"

Sarah Wilson retreated to her seat in disgrace; but I am forced to confess that I was myself guilty of the offence for which I had punished her, for I could not resist peeping through the curtains as soon as the sermon began.

He was sitting in the farther corner of a pew midway between the altar and the door, and leaning

back in such a manner that I could see his pale face and his large dark eyes distinctly. His clothes were of a foreign make and style; his hair was long, and fell in careless masses about his face; and it was probably his large moustache that caused the child to take him for a Frenchman "or a Turk." His face was more intellectual than handsome; and I could not help fancying, as I looked at him, that he must be fond of music.

Somehow, I took especial pains with my concluding voluntary that afternoon, and it was wonderful how long it took me to select one from amongst the piles of music in the corner. First I fixed upon a fugue of Sebastian Bach's; then upon a "Gloria" by Mozart; then upon a movement from the "Mount of Olives." At last I chose the Hallelujah Chorus in the "Messiah" (the most divine piece of music in the world), and played it with all my heart. Indeed, I entered into it with so much enthusiasm and pleasure, that, until I had concluded, and chanced to see him standing there in his place alone in the church, looking up earnestly towards the organ, I had forgotten all about the foreign stranger.

Of course I drew back directly, and busied myself in putting away the music, and locking the organ doors, and when I looked round again, he was gone.

I saw no more of him, heard no more of him — yet I could not keep from thinking of him all the week, and wondering whether he would return on the following Sunday. I fancied that he would — indeed, so certain of it was I, that, when I found

him occupying his former place before any one else had entered the church, I felt no surprise at it.

This time, he not only remained listening to my playing after the rest had dispersed, but waited beside the porch till I came out.

"Permit me to thank you, lady, for your beautiful music," he said, courteously. "It is long since I have heard such playing."

I blushed, bowed, and passed on; but his words rung in my ears for days after. I was almost angry with myself for thinking of him so much; but his look, the tone of his deep voice, the hesitating accent with which he spoke, haunted me strangely. I did not think that he was a foreigner; it seemed to me more as if he had lived much abroad. As for his age, it was perhaps thirty or thirty-five. He might be younger; but the gravity of his manner gave him the appearance of a man in the prime of life.

For two or three more Sundays this continued. He contrived each time to address me, but always with profound respect. I came, by-and-by, almost to live upon these weekly meetings; and, I fear, thought of little else from Sabbath to Sabbath.

I met him one morning by the river side. It was my favourite walk; and, though the autumn was far advanced, it was not yet too cold to stroll, book in hand, through the green meadows and under the alders beside the water's edge.

He spoke to me — he walked beside me — he talked of music, of books, of rural life. He told me he was an author; and spoke of the lands he

had visited, and the scenery through which he had passed. I listened in a kind of dream. I had never before heard so eloquent a voice. His every word sank into my heart, and warmed my imagination. He said he would lend me a book which he had written, and would bring it next morning to the meadow in which we had met. I made an effort to refuse it, but he over-ruled my objections and — I went.

Let me pass over the weeks that followed. Let me not dwell upon the frequency of our after-meetings — the charmed eloquence of his speech — the rapt and humble delight with which I listened and learned. His books were grave and full of thought — far more profound than any I had attempted to read before that time. Yet I strove to comprehend his philosophy, and pored over the pages night after night that I might be able to speak of them with him, and render myself worthier of his friendship.

Ay! his friendship — for he never spoke to me of love. Yet I loved him — loved him timidly, reverently, as a child might have loved! The very touch of his hand when we met and when we parted, made me tremble — the merest glance from his calm eyes seemed to blind and trouble me. Had they once looked upon me in anger, I felt as if I must have fallen at his feet and died.

It was wrong, foolish, childish — what you will; but it was not surprising that I should so worship the first who had been kind and gentle

with me. Remember — I was so young, so lonely, so in need of affection and support!

The winter came, and there were many days of rain and snow when I could not venture out; and those were melancholy days for me — yet sometimes, even then, he would not suffer them to go by without once seeing my face, and would walk patiently up and down the road in front of my little cottage, till I chanced to look from the window.

Then came Christmas time, and he told me that he must go to London for some days to visit his friends. He parted from me very coldly and gravely, as was his wont; but, when he had gone a little distance, came back, and, saying that he should return on New-Year's-day, lifted my hand suddenly to his lips, and turned away.

It was the first token of love that he had shown for me — the very first! Sometimes, it is true, I had fancied I observed a deeper thrill in his voice, a darker fire in his eyes — but it was so fleeting that I had scarcely dared to frame it into words; and, after all, it might have been fancy only. But this kiss! this burning kiss upon my hand! I hastened home; and, entering my little parlour, kissed my own hand over and over again where his lips had rested upon it.

I do not now remember any of those days between Christmas-day and the last day of the old year. They glided past me like the pictures of a magic lantern, and I lived as one dreaming. Nothing seemed as it was before. People's faces passing in the street, looked more cheerful; the wintry land-

scape was beautiful in my eyes; the sound of my own voice, as I used to sit singing softly to myself, appeared to have grown sweeter with my happiness.

Then came the thirty-first of December. To-morrow! oh, to-morrow I should see him again. My heart beat strangely when I thought of that; and I so longed to greet the day and year which would herald in my golden future, that I resolved to sit by my fireside and hear the clocks strike twelve.

It was a very cold and silent night. My little house stands just on the outskirts of the town, and the far fields beyond the hedge were covered with deep snow. I drew the curtains close, piled a blazing fire, and tried to read. It was useless. I could not fix my thoughts that night. There was a strange, restless, expectant feeling upon me; and as the evening hours went by, I became nervous and agitated.

All at once I felt that he was there, and I trembled. I had heard no sound; I had received no warning of his coming; and yet I knew that he was standing yonder, outside the window.

What awful mysterious sympathy was that which I then experienced, and which occurs to all of us at some time or other during life?

I rose, went over, and drew the curtain. Merciful Heaven! the promptings of my heart were right — he was standing close beside the lattice, and the moonlight was shining down upon his face!

"Alice!" he said softly. "Alice!"

I opened the window, and leaned out into the cold night.

"I said I would be here on New-Year's-day," he said, and his voice was agitated and broken. "It will be New-Year's-day in a few moments more. I have travelled miles that I might see you. I come to say good-bye!"

I would have spoken; but the words died away upon my lips. I could only clasp my hands silently together.

"I have received news of my brother's illness," he continued; "that brother in Madeira, of whom I have told you. I must go to him; but I will write to you by the first ship. I felt I must speak to you again before I left. I could not go without saying how I love you! Hark!" he said, pausing suddenly, and lifting his finger. "They are tolling out the year!"

And the low solemn tones of the bells of St. Martha came moaning through the night.

"The year is almost gone, Alice! Tell me, before it is past, that you love me!"

"I do love you."

The church clock now began to strike.

"I shall be home again before long, Alice. Promise me that you will be my bride before these clocks strike out a year again!"

"I promise."

The clock was still striking.

He grasped the vine with both his hands, and climbed up to the window where I stood.

"Kiss me, Alice — kiss me on the lips before I go! I must be in London by daylight; and the

chaise waits for me in the road. One kiss, my life! — one kiss at parting!"

He was hanging to the window by his hands; I laid mine upon them, for he could not remove them to clasp my fingers in his; and then, bending down, I kissed him for the first and only time.

At that instant, the joy-bells rang out their merry chimes like a chorus of laughing voices — his hands slipped away beneath mine — he dropped down upon the snowy path below, and, crying aloud to me, "A happy new year, my darling," ran swiftly along the road, and disappeared.

How long I stood there at the open window listening to the bells, I know not; but when I returned to my seat, the fire had gone out, and the candle was expiring in the socket.

I have but little more to tell; and yet I feel that I would fain write on and on, and still defer the story of my sorrow. But it must be said, and a very few words will suffice to relate it.

The promised letter never came.

The weary, weary months passed by; the spring-time came and went; the golden summer brought its flowers, the autumn its fruits; and yet I never heard from him. Life grew stale and heavy for me; hope died slowly from my heart; a dull, listless melancholy took possession of my whole soul; and I only wished to die.

Then the winter came again with all its varied aspects, and my only comfort was in wandering where I had wandered a year since with him — in recalling each word that he had uttered — in

reading once more each book that I had read with him. Christmas-day passed by. If I had had any hope left, it faded from me when this day was past; "for surely," I thought, "were he still alive, he would have written to me now."

The New-Year's-eve was come again; a foggy, misty night, unlike the last. I was sitting by my fireside with my head buried in my hands, too miserable for tears, when a letter was brought to me — a letter written in an unknown hand; a letter which had been directed and re-directed many times, and which bore the postage marks of many places. A dread came upon me, for I felt that here was something concerning him whom I loved. For several moments I dared not open it, and having opened it, it was some time before I dared to read it. This was what it told me: —

"MADAM, — It has devolved upon me to inform you of the painful intelligence of the death of Mr. B——, of ——. He was taken seriously ill during the voyage to Madeira, and expired before we reached the port of Funchal. I enclose a piece of his hair and this ring, which he was in the habit of wearing.

"I am, Madam, &c., &c."

You see that my story is but a common-place one, after all; but perhaps, now that you have heard it, you will not be surprised when I say that New-Year's-day was the happiest, and is the most sorrowful of my life.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PAINTER OF ROTTERDAM.

My father was a trader and distiller at Schiedam, on the Maas. Without being wealthy, we enjoyed the means of procuring every social comfort. We gave and received visits from a few old friends; we went occasionally to the theatre; and my father had his tulip-garden and summer-house at a little distance from Schiedam, on the banks of the canal which connects the town with the river.

But my father and mother, whose only child I was, cherished one dream of ambition, in which, fortunately, my own tastes led me to participate: they wanted me to become a painter. "Let me but see a picture by Franz Linden in the gallery at Rotterdam," said my father, "and I shall die happy." So, at fourteen years of age, I was removed from school, and placed in the classes of Messer Kesler, an artist living at Delft. Here I made such progress, that by the time I had reached my nineteenth birthday, I was transferred to the *atelier* of Hans van Roos, a descendant of the celebrated family of that name. Van Roos was not more than thirty-eight or forty years of age, and had already acquired a considerable reputation as a painter of portraits and sacred subjects. There was an altar-piece of his in one of our finest churches; his

works had occupied the place of honour for the last six years at the annual exhibition; and for portraiture he numbered among his patrons most of the wealthy merchants and burgomasters of the city. Indeed, there could be no question that my master was rapidly acquiring a fortune commensurate with his popularity.

Still he was not a cheerful man. It was whispered by the pupils that he had met with a disappointment early in life — that he had loved, had been accepted, and, on the eve of marriage, was rejected by the lady for a more wealthy suitor. He came from Friesland, in the north of Holland, when a very young man. He had always been the same gloomy, pallid, labour-loving citizen. He was a rigid Calvinist. He was sparing of domestic expenditure, and liberal to the poor: — this every one could tell you, and no one knew more.

The number of his pupils was limited to six. He kept us constantly at work, and scarcely permitted us to exchange a word with each other during the day. Standing there among us so silently, with the light from above pouring down upon his pallid face, and, becoming absorbed in the sombre folds of his long black dressing-gown, he looked almost like some stern old portrait himself. To tell the truth, we were all somewhat afraid of him. Not that he assumed any undue authority: on the contrary, he was stately, silent, and frigidly polite; but his politeness had in it something oppressive, and we were all happier out of his presence. None of us resided under his roof. I had a second floor in a

neighbouring street, and two of my fellow-students occupied rooms in the same house. We used to meet at night in each other's chambers, and make excursions to the exhibitions and theatres; and sometimes, on a summer's evening, we would hire a pleasure-boat, and row for a mile or two down the river. We were merry enough then, and not quite so silent, I promise you, as in the gloomy studio of Hans van Roos.

In the meantime, I was anxious to glean every benefit from my master's instructions. I improved rapidly, and my paintings soon excelled those of the other five. My taste did not incline to sacred subjects, like that of Van Roos; but rather to the familiar rural style of Berghem and Paul Potter. It was my great delight to wander along the rich pasture-lands; to watch the amber sunset; the herds going home to the dairy; the lazy windmills; and the calm clear waters of the canals, scarcely ruffled by the passage of the public *treckschuyt*.* In depicting scenes of this nature —

> **The slow canal, the yellow-blossomed vale,**
> **The willow-tufted bank, the gliding sail —**

I was singularly fortunate. My master never praised me by word or look; but when my father came up one day from Schiedam to visit me, he drew him aside and told him, in a voice inaudible to the rest, that "Messer Franz would do credit to the profession;" which so delighted the good distiller, that he straightway took me out with him for

* Canal boat.

the day, and, having given me fifteen gold pieces as a testimony of his satisfaction, took me to dine with his friend the burgomaster, Von Gael. It was an eventful visit for me. On that evening I first fell in love.

Few people, I think, would at that time have denied the personal attractions of Gertrude von Gael; yet I do not know that it was so much her features as her soft voice and gentle womanly grace that fascinated me. Though so young, she performed the honours of her father's princely table with self-possession and good-breeding. In the evening she sang some sweet German songs to her own simple accompaniment. We talked of books and of poetry. I found her well read in English, French, and German literature. We spoke of art; and she discovered both judgment and enthusiasm.

As we took our leave at night, the burgomaster shook me warmly by the hand, and told me to come often. I fancied that Gertrude's blue eyes brightened when he said it, and I felt the colour rush quickly to my brow as I bowed and thanked him.

"Franz," said my father, when we were once more in the street, "how old are you?"

"Just twenty-two, sir," I replied, rather surprised at the question.

"You will not be dependent on your brush, my boy," continued my father, as he leaned upon my arm and looked back at the lofty mansion we had just left. "I have been neither wasteful nor unsuc-

cessful; and it will be my pride to leave you a respectable income at my death."

I inclined my head in silence, and wondered what would come next.

"Burgomeister von Gael is one of my oldest friends," said my father.

"I have often heard you speak of him, sir," I replied.

"And he is rich."

"So I should suppose."

"Gertrude will have a fine fortune," said my father, as if thinking aloud.

I bowed again, but this time rather nervously.

"Marry her, Franz."

I dropped his arm, and started back.

"Sir!" I faltered, "I — I — marry the Fräulein von Gael!"

"And pray, sir, why not?" said my father curtly, stopping short in his walk, and leaning both hands upon the top of his walking-stick.

I made no reply.

"Why not, sir?" repeated my father very energetically. "What could you wish for better? The young lady is handsome, good-tempered, educated, rich. Now, Franz, if I thought you had been such a fool as to form any other attachment without . . ."

"Oh, sir, you do me injustice!" I cried. "Indeed, I have done nothing of the kind. But do you think that — that she would have me?"

"Try her, Franz," said my father good-humouredly, as he resumed my arm. "If I am not very much mistaken, the burgomeister would be as well

pleased as myself; and as for the fraülein — women are easily won."

We had by this time reached the door of the inn where my father was to sleep for the night. As he left me, his last words were: —

"Try her, Franz — try her."

From this time I became a frequent visitor at the house of the Burgomaster von Gael. It was a large old-fashioned mansion, built of red brick, and situated upon the famous line of houses known as the Boompjes. In front lay the broad river, crowded with merchant vessels, from whose masts fluttered the flags of all the trading nations of the world. Tall trees, thick with foliage, lined the quays, and the sunlight flickered through their leaves upon the spacious drawing-rooms of Gertrude's home.

Here, night after night, when the studies of the day were over, I used to sit with her beside the open window, watching the busy crowd beneath, the rippling river, and the rising moon that tipped the masts and city spires with silver. Here we read together from the pages of our favourite poets, and counted the first pale stars that trembled into light.

It was a happy time. But there came at last a time still happier, when, one still evening as we sat alone, conversing in unfrequent whispers, and listening to the beating of each other's hearts. I told Gertrude that I loved her; and she, in answer, laid her fair head upon my shoulder with a sweet confidence, as if content so to rest for ever. Just as my father had predicted, the burgomaster readily

sanctioned our betrothal, specifying but one condition, and this was that our marriage should not take place till I had attained my twenty-fifth year. It was a long time to wait; but I should by that time, perhaps, have made a name in my profession. I intended soon to send a picture to the annual exhibition — and who could tell what I might not do in three years to show Gertrude how dearly I loved her!

And so our happy youth rolled on, and the quaint old dial in Messer von Gael's tulip-garden told the passage of our golden hours. In the meantime, I worked sedulously at my picture. I laboured upon it all the winter; and when spring-time came, I sent it in, with no small anxiety as to its probable position upon the walls of the gallery. It was a view in one of the streets of Rotterdam. There were the high old houses with their gables and carven doorways, and the red sunset glittering on the panes of the upper windows — the canal flowing down the centre of the street — the white drawbridge, with a barge just passing underneath — the green trees deep in shadow, and the spire of the Church of St. Lawrence rising beyond, against the clear warm sky. When it was quite finished and about to be sent away, even Hans van Roos nodded a cold encouragement, and said that it deserved a good position. He had himself prepared a painting this year, on a more ambitious scale and a larger canvas than usual. It was a sacred subject, and represented the Conversion of St. Paul. His pupils admired it warmly, and none more than myself. We all pronounced it to be

his masterpiece, and the artist was evidently of our opinion.

The day of exhibition came at last. I had scarcely slept the previous night; and the early morning found me, with a number of other students, waiting impatiently before the yet unopened door. When I arrived, it wanted an hour to the time, but half the day seemed to elapse before we heard the heavy bolts give way inside, and then forced our way through the narrow barriers. I had flown up the staircase, and found myself in the first room, before I remembered that I should have purchased a catalogue at the door. I had not patience, however, to go back for it; so I strode round and round the room, looking eagerly for my picture. It was nowhere to be seen; and I passed on to the next. Here my search was equally unsuccessful.

"It must be in the third room," I said to myself, "where all the best works are placed! Well, if it be hung ever so high, or in ever so dark a corner, it is, at all events, an honour to have one's picture in the third room!"

But, though I spoke so bravely, it was with a sinking heart I ventured in. I could not really hope for a good place among the magnates of the art; while in either of the other rooms there had been a possibility that my picture might receive a tolerable position.

The house had formerly been the mansion of a merchant of enormous wealth, who had left it, with his valuable collection of paintings, to the State. The third room had been his reception-chamber, and

the space over the magnificently carved chimney was assigned, as the place of honour, to the best painting. The painter of this picture always received a costly prize, for which he was likewise indebted to the munificence of the founder. To this spot, my eyes were naturally turned as I entered the door. Was I dreaming? I stood still — I turned hot and cold by turns — I ran forward. It was no illusion! There was my picture, my own picture, in its little modest frame, installed in the chief place of the gallery! And there, too, was the official card stuck in the corner, with the words "PRIZE PAINTING," printed upon it in shining gold letters. I ran down the staircase and bought a catalogue, that my eyes might be gladdened by the confirmation of this joy; and there, sure enough, was printed at the very commencement: "ANNUAL PRIZE PAINTING — *View in Rotterdam*, No 127 — FRANZ LINDEN." I could have wept for delight. I was never tired of looking at my picture. I walked from one side to the other — I retreated — I advanced closer to it — I looked at it in every possible light, and forgot all but my happiness.

"A very charming little painting, sir," said a voice at my elbow.

It was an elderly gentleman, with gold spectacles, and an umbrella. I coloured up, and said falteringly —

"Do you think so?"

"I do, sir," said the old gentleman. "I am an amateur — I am very fond of pictures. I presume that you are also an admirer of art?"

I bowed.

"Very nice little painting, indeed; ve-ry nice," he continued, as he wiped his glasses, and adjusted them with the air of a connoisseur. "Water very liquid, colours pure, sky transparent, perspective admirable. I'll buy it."

"Will you?" I exclaimed, joyfully. "Oh! thank you, sir!"

"Oh," said the old gentleman, turning suddenly upon me and smiling kindly, "so you are the artist, are you? Happy to make your acquaintance, Messer Linden. You are a very young man to paint such a picture as that. I congratulate you sir: and — I'll buy it."

So we exchanged cards, shook hands, and became the best friends in the world. I was burning with impatience to see Gertrude, and tell her all my good fortune; but my new patron took my arm, and said that he must make the tour of the rooms in my company; so I was forced to comply.

We stopped before a large painting that occupied the next best situation to mine: it was my master's work, the Conversion of St. Paul. While I was telling him of my studies in the atelier of the painter, a man started from before us, and glided away; but not before I had recognised the pale countenance of Van Roos. There was something in the expression of his face that shocked me, something that stopped my breath, and made me shudder. What was it? I scarcely knew; but the glare of his dark eyes and the quivering passion of his lip haunted me for the rest of the day, and came back again in my dreams.

I said nothing of it to Gertrude that afternoon, but it had effectually sobered my exultation. I dreaded, next day, to return to the studio; but, to my surprise, my master received me as he never had received me before. He advanced, and extended his hand to me.

"Welcome, Franz Linden," he said, smiling; "I am proud to call you my pupil."

The hand was cold — the voice was harsh — the smile was passionless. My companions crowded round, and congratulated me; and in the warm tones of their young, cheerful voices, and the close pressure of their friendly hands, I forgot all that had troubled me in the manner of Van Roos.

Not long after this event, Gertrude's father desired to have her portrait painted — to console him for her absence, he said, when I should be so wicked as to take her away from him. I recommended my old master, whose tutelage I had recently left; and Van Roos was summoned to fulfil a task that I would gladly have performed, had it been in my power to do so. But portraiture was not my line. I could paint a sleek, spotted milch cow, or a drove of sheep, far better than the fair skin and golden curls of my darling Gertrude.

She could not endure the artist from the first. In vain I reasoned with her — all was of no use; and she used to say, at the end of every such conversation, that she wished the portrait were finished, and that she could no more help disliking him than — than she could help loving me. So our arguments always ended with a kiss.

But this portrait took a long time. Van Roos was in general a rapid painter; yet Gertrude's likeness progressed at a very slow pace, and, like Penelope's web, seemed never to be completed. One morning I happened to be in the room — a rare event at that time, for I was hard at work upon my new landscape; and I was struck by the change that had come over my late master. He was no longer the same man. There was a light in his eye, and a vibration in his voice, that I had never observed before; and when he rose to take leave, there was a studied courtesy in his bow and manner that took me quite by surprise.

Still, I never suspected the truth, and still the portrait was as far as ever from being finished.

It all came out at last; and one morning Hans van Roos made a formal offer of his hand and heart. Of course, he was refused.

"But as kindly as was possible, dear Franz," she said, when she told me in the evening; "because he is your friend, and because he seemed to feel it so deeply. And — and you don't know how dreadfully white he turned, and how he tried to restrain his tears. I pitied him, Franz — indeed, I was very sorry!"

And the gentle creature could scarcely keep from weeping herself as she told me.

I did not see Van Roos for some months after this disclosure. At last I met him accidentally in front of the stadthouse, and, to my surprise, for the second time in his life, he held out his hand.

"A good day to you, Messer Linden," said he.

"I hear that you are on the high road to fame and fortune."

"I have been very prosperous, Messer van Roos," I replied, taking the proffered hand. "But I never forget that I owe my present proficiency to the hours spent in your atelier."

A peculiar expression flitted over his face.

"If thought that," said he, hastily, "I . . . I should esteem myself particularly happy."

There was so odd a difference in the way in which he uttered the beginning and end of this sentence — so much hurry and passion in the first half, such deliberate politeness in the last, that I started and looked him full in the face. He was as smiling and impenetrable as a marble statue.

"I, too, have been fortunate," he said, after a moment's pause. "Have you seen the new church lately built near the east end of the Haring-vliet?"

I replied that I had observed it in passing, but had not been inside.

"I have been entrusted," he said, "with the superintendence of the interior decorations. My 'Conversion of St. Paul' is purchased for the altar-piece, and I am now engaged in painting a series of frescoes upon the ceiling. Will you come in one day, and give me your opinion upon them?"

I professed myself much flattered, and appointed to visit him in the church on the following morning. He was waiting for me at the door when I arrived, with the heavy keys in his hand. We passed in, and he turned the key in the lock.

"I always secure myself against intruders," he

said, smiling. "People will come into the church if I leave the doors unfastened; and I do not choose to carry on my art, like a signpainter, in the presence of every blockhead who chooses to stand and stare at me."

It was surprising in what a disagreeable manner this man shewed his teeth when he smiled.

The church was a handsome building, in that Italian style which imitates the antique, and prefers grace and magnificence to the dignified sanctity of the Gothic order. A row of elegant Corinthian columns supported the roof at each side of the nave; gilding and decorative cornices were lavished in every direction; the gorgeous altar-piece already occupied its appointed station; and a little to the left of the railed space where the communion-table was to be placed, a lofty scaffolding was erected, that seemed, from where I stood, almost to come in contact with the roof, and above which I observed the yet unfinished sketch of a masterly fresco. Three or four more, already completed, were stationed at regular intervals, and some others were merely outlined in charcoal upon their intended site.

"Will you not come up with me?" asked the painter, when I had expressed my admiration sufficiently; "or are you afraid of turning giddy?"

I felt somewhat disinclined to impose this trial on my nerves, but still more disinclined to confess it; so I followed him up from flight to flight of the frail structure, without once daring to look down.

At last we reached the summit. As I had supposed, there was not even room enough for the artist

to assume a sitting posture, and he had to paint while lying on his back. I had no fancy to extend myself on this lofty couch; so I only lifted my head above the level of his flooring, looked at the fresco, and descended immediately to the flight below, where I waited till he rejoined me.

"How dangerous it must be," said I, shuddering, "to let yourself down from that abominable perch!"

"I used to think so at first," he replied, "but I am now quite accustomed to it. Fancy," said he, approaching close to the edge of the scaffolding — "fancy falling from here into the church below!"

"Horrible!" cried I.

"I wonder how high it is from the level of the pavement," continued Van Roos musingly; "a hundred and eighty feet, I daresay — perhaps two hundred."

I drew back, giddy at the thought.

"No man could survive such a fall," said the painter, still looking over. "The thickest skull would be dashed to atoms on the marble down there."

"Pray, come away," said I, hastily. "My head swims at the very idea."

"Does it?" said he, turning suddenly upon me with the voice and eye of a fiend — "does it? Fool!" he cried as he seized me round the body in his iron clasp — "fool, to trust yourself here with me — me whom you have wronged, whose life you have blasted! — me whom you have crossed in fame

and in love! Down, wretch, down! I've vowed to have your blood, and my time has come!"

It sickens me even now to recall that desperate struggle. At the first word, I had sprung back and seized a beam above my head. He strove to tear me from it. He foamed at the mouth; the veins rose like knots upon his forehead; and still — though I felt my wrists strained and my fingers cruelly lacerated — still I held on with the terrible energy of one who struggles for dear life. It lasted a long time — at least it seemed long to me — and the scaffolding rocked beneath our feet. At length I saw his strength failing. Suddenly I loosed my hold, and threw my whole weight upon him. He staggered — he shrieked — he fell!

I dropped upon my face in mute horror. An age of silence seemed to elapse, and the cold dews stood upon my brow. Presently I heard a dull sound far below. I crawled to the brink of the scaffolding, and looked over — a shapeless mass was lying on the marble pavement, and all around it was red with blood.

I think an hour must have elapsed before I could summon courage to descend. When, at length, I reached the level ground, I turned my face from what was so near my feet, and tottered to the door. With trembling hands and misty eyes, I unlocked it, and rushed into the street.

It was many months before I recovered from the brain fever brought on by that terrible day. My ravings, I have been told, were fearful; and had

any doubt existed in the minds of men as to which of us two had been the guilty one, those ravings were alone sufficient to establish my innocence. A man in a delirious fever is pretty sure to speak the truth. By the time I was able to leave my chamber, Gertrude also had grown pale and spiritless, and all unlike her former self. Rotterdam was insupportable to me. I found myself a hero of romance; a lion; a thing to be stared after wherever I went — all of which only served to shatter my nerves still more. In short, change of air and scene was recommended for us both; so we thought we could not do better than marry, and take our wedding tour for the sake of our healths. And I assure you, reader, it did us both a great deal of good.

CHAPTER IX.

LOVE AND MONEY.

Ems is a charming place. It lies about twelve miles to the south-east of Coblentz, in the valley of the Lahn, — that miniature Rhine, all bordered with orchards and vineyards, and steep wooded hills. The town consists of one irregular line of hotels and lodging-houses, with the mountains at the back, the river in front, and long double rows of acacias and lindens planted at each side of the carriage-way. Swarms of donkeys with gay saddles, attended by drivers in blue blouses and scarlet-trimmed caps, loiter beneath the trees, soliciting hire. The Duke of Nassau's band plays alternate selections from German, Italian, and French music in the public garden. Fashionable invalids are promenading. Gaming is going forward busily in the Conversation-Haus alike daily and nightly. Ladies are reading novels and eating ices within hearing of the band; or go by, with coloured-glass tumblers in their hands, towards the Kurhaus, where the hot springs came bubbling up from their nauseous sources down in the low vaulted galleries filled with bazaar-like shops, loungers, touters, and health-seekers. All is pleasure, indolence, and flirtation.

To Ems, therefore, came the Herr Graff von Steinberg — or, as we should say, the Count von

Steinberg — to drink the waters, and while away a few weeks of the summer season. He was a tall, fair, handsome young man; an excellent specimen of the German dragoon. You would never have supposed, to look at him, that illness could have brought him to Ems; and yet he suffered from two very serious maladies, both of which, it was to be feared, were incurable by any springs, medicinal or otherwise. In a word, he was hopelessly in love, and desperately poor. The case was this: — His grandfather had left a large property, which his father, an irreclaimable gamester, had spent to the uttermost farthing. The youth had been placed in the army, through the interest of a friend. His father was now dead; the inheritance for ever gone; and he had absolutely nothing beyond his pay as a captain of dragoons, and the distant prospect of one day retiring with the title and half-pay of major. A sorry future for one who was disinterestedly and deeply in love with one of the richest heiresses in Germany!

"Who marries my daughter will receive with her a dowry of 200,000 florins, and I shall expect her husband to possess, at the least, an equal fortune."

So said the Baron of Hohendorf, in cold reply to the lover's timid declaration; and with these words still sounding in his ears, weighing on his spirits, and lying by day and night heavily upon his heart, came the Count von Steinberg to seek forgetfulness, or, at least, temporary amusement, at the Brunnen of Ems. But in vain. Pale and silent, he roamed

restlessly to and fro upon the public promenades, or wandered away to hide his wretchedness in the forests and valleys round about. Sometimes he would mingle with the gay crowd in the Kurhaus, and taste the bitter waters; sometimes linger mournfully round the tables of the gaming company, gazing enviously, yet with a kind of virtuous horror, at the glittering heaps of gold, and the packets of crisp yellow notes which there changed hands so swiftly and in such profusion. But Albert von Steinberg was no gambler. He had seen and experienced the evil of that terrible vice too keenly already in his own father, to fall a prey to it himself. Years ago, he had vowed never to play; and kept his oath. Even now, when he found himself, as it might happen now and then, looking on with some little interest at the gains and losses of others, he would shudder, turn suddenly away, and not return again for days. Nothing could be more regular than his mode of life. In the morning he took the waters; at noon he walked, or read, or wrote; in the evening he strolled out again and heard the band, and by the time that all the society of the place was assembled in the ball-room or at the tables, he had returned to his quiet lodgings, and, perhaps, already gone to bed, in order that he might rise early the next morning to study some scientific work, or take a pedestrian excursion to the ruins of some old castle within the limits of a long walk.

It was a dull life for a young man — especially with that sweet, sad recollection of Emma von Hohendorf pervading every thought of the day. And all

because he was poor! Was poverty a crime, he asked himself, that he should be punished for it thus? He had a great mind to throw himself off the rock where he was standing — or to precipitate himself into the river, if it were deep enough — or to go to the baron's own castle-gate, and shoot himself — or — or, in short, to do anything desperate, if it were only sufficiently romantic; for his hot young German head, full of sentiment and Schiller, would be content with nothing less than an imposing tragedy.

He thought all this, sitting in a little fantastic summer-house perched high up on a ledge of steep rock just in front of the gardens and public buildings. He looked down at the gay company far beneath, and he heard the faint music of the royal band. The sun was just setting — the landscape was lovely — life was sill sweet, and he thought that he would not commit suicide that evening, at all events. So he went moodily down the winding pathway, across the bridge, and, quite by chance, wandered once more into the Conversation Haus. The gaming was going on, the glittering gold pieces were changing hands, the earnest players sitting round as usual. The sight only made him more unhappy.

"Two hundred thousand florins!" he thought to himself. "Two hundred thousand florins would make me the happiest man on earth, and I cannot get them. These men win and lose two hundred thousand florins ten times over in a week, and think nothing of the good, the happiness, the wealth that sum would be to numbers of their fellow-creatures. What a miserable dog I am!"

And he pulled his hat on fiercely, folded his arms, and strode out of the rooms, taking the road to his own lodging with so dismal an air that the people in the streets turned and looked after him, saying, "He has lost money — we saw him come out of the gaming-rooms."

"Lost money!" muttered he to himself, as he went into his garret and locked the door. "Lost money, indeed! I wish I had any to lose."

And poor Albert von Steinberg fell asleep, lamenting that the age of fairies and gnomes had passed away.

His sleep was long, sound, dreamless — for young men, in spite of love and poverty, sleep pleasantly. He woke somewhat later than he had intended, rubbed his eyes, yawned, looked hazily at his watch, lay down again, once more opened his eyes, and at last sprang valiantly out of bed.

Is he still dreaming? Is it an hallucination? Can he be mad? No, it is real, true, wonderful! There upon the table lies a brilliant heap of golden pieces — hard, ringing, real golden pieces, and he turns them over, weighs them in his hands, lets them drop through his fingers to test the evidence of his senses.

How did they come there? That is the important question. He rings the bell violently, once — twice — thrice. The servant runs up, thinking some dreadful accident has occurred.

"Some one has been here to call upon me this morning?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Indeed! Somebody, then, has been upstairs since I have been asleep."

"No, Monsieur."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, Monsieur."

"Now speak the truth, Bertha; some one has been here. You are paid to deny it. Only tell me who it was, and I will give you double for your information."

The servant looked both alarmed and astonished.

"Indeed there has not been a soul. Does monsieur miss anything from his apartment? Shall I send for the gens-d'armes?"

The count looked searchingly in the girl's face. She seemed wholly sincere and truthful. He tried every means yet left — adroit questions, insinuations, bribes, sudden accusations; but in vain. She had seen no one — heard no one. The door of the house was closed, and had not been left open. No one — absolutely no one — had been there.

Puzzled, troubled, bewildered, our young friend dismissed her, believing, in spite of his surprise, the truth of what she stated. He then locked the door and counted the money.

Ten thousand florins! not a groschen more or less!

Well, it was there; but whence it came remained a mystery.

"All mysteries clear themselves up in time," said he, as he locked the money in his bureau. "I dare-say I shall find it all out by-and-by. In the meantime I will not touch a single florin of it."

He tried not to think of it, but it was so strange a thing that he could not prevent it running in his head. It even kept him awake at night, and took away his appetite by day. At last he began to forget it; at all events, he became used to it, and at the end of a week it had ceased to trouble him.

About eight days from the date of this occurrence he woke, as before, thinking of Emma, and not at all of the money, when, on looking round, lo! there it was again. The table was once more covered with glittering gold!

His first impulse was to run to the bureau in which the first ten thousand florins were stored away. Surely he must have taken them out the night before, and forgotten to replace them. No, there they lay in the drawer where he had hidden them, and there upon the table was a second supply, larger, if anything, than the first!

Pale and trembling, he turned them over. This time there were some notes — Prussian and French — mingled with the gold. In all, twelve thousand florins.

He had locked his door — could it be opened from without by a skeleton key? He had a bolt fixed within, that very day. Honest Albert Von Steinberg! he took as much pains against fortune as others do against robbery!

Two days later, however, his invisible benefactor came again; and this time he found himself fourteen thousand florins the richer. It was an inexplicable prodigy! No one could have entered by the bolted door, or from the window; for he lived in a garret

on the fourth story — or by the chimney, for the room was heated by a stove, the funnel of which was no thicker than his arm? Was it a plot to ruin him? or was he tempted by the powers of evil? He had a great mind to apply to the police, or to a priest (for he was a good Catholic), — still he thought he would wait a little longer. After all, there might be more unpleasant visitations!

He went out, greatly agitated, and walked about the entire day, pondering this strange problem. Then he resolved, if ever it recurred, to state his case to the *chef de police*, and to set a watch upon the house by night.

Full of this determination, he came home and went to bed. In the morning, when he woke, he found that Fortune had again visited him. The first wonder of the thing had now worn off; so he rose, dressed himself, and sat down leisurely to count the money over, before lodging his declaration at the *bureau de police*. While he was engaged in making up little rouleaux of gold, twenty in each rouleau, there came a sudden knocking at his door.

He had no friends in Ems. He started like a guilty man, and threw an overcoat hastily upon the table, so as to conceal the gold. Could it be that this summons had anything to do with the money? Was he suspected of something that —. The knock was repeated, this time more imperatively. He opened the door. It was the Baron Von Hohendorf!

"How! The Baron Von Hohendorf in Ems! I am rejoiced — this honour — I — pray be seated."

The poor young dragoon's heart beat so fast, and he trembled so with pleasure, hope, and astonishment, that he could scarcely speak.

The baron looked at him steadily, but sternly; thrust back the proffered chair; and took no notice of the extended hand.

"Yes, Herr Count," he said drily. "I arrived yesterday in this place. You did not expect to see me."

"Indeed, no. It is a pleasure — a — delight — a . . . ."

He was so agitated that he forgot his visitor was standing, and sat down; but rose again directly.

"And yet I saw you, Herr Count, yesterday evening, as you came out of the Conversation-rooms."

"Me? Indeed, sir, I never visited the Conversation-rooms at all yesterday; but I am very sorry that I was not there, since I should have had the honour of meeting you."

"Pardon me, Herr Count, I saw you. It is useless to argue the point with me, for I stood close behind your chair for the greater part of an hour. Do you know why I am here this morning in your apartment?"

The young man blushed, faltered, turned pale. He knew but one reason that could have brought a visit from the baron. Had he relented? Could it be his generous design to make two lovers' hearts happy by granting that consent which he formerly refused? There were things more impossible. The baron was capable of such goodness! Something to

this effect he stammered in broken sentences, his eyes fixed upon the ground, and his hands playing nervously with a pen.

The baron drew himself to his full height. If he had looked stern before, he looked furious now. For a few moments he could hardly speak for rage. At last his wrath broke forth.

"Impertinence such as this, Herr Count, I did not expect! I came here, sir, to give some words of advice to your father's son — to warn — to interpose, if possible, between you and your destruction. I did not come to be insulted!"

"Insulted, baron?" repeated the young man, somewhat haughtily. "I have said nothing to call for such a phrase at your lips, unless, indeed, my poverty insults you. The richest man in this land could do no more than love your daughter, and were she a queen, the homage of the poorest would not disgrace her."

"Permit me to ask you one question. What brings you to Ems?"

The young man hesitated, and the baron smiled ironically.

"I came, sir," he said at length, "in search of — I will confess it — in search of peace, of forgetfulness, of consolation."

His voice broke: he looked down, and remained silent.

The baron laughed aloud — a harsh mocking laugh that caused Albert to raise his head with a movement of sudden indignation.

"I have not deserved this treatment at your

hands, Baron Hohendorf," he said, turning towards the window.

"A gambler deserves only the contempt of honourable men," replied the baron.

"A gambler!" repeated Albert. "Good heavens, sir! I have never touched a card in my life."

"What effrontery! You forget, then, that it is in my power to confront you with the proof of your vice; nay, at this instant to confound and convict you. What gold is this?"

And the old gentleman, whose eyes had already detected the glimmer of the coin beneath the coat, lifted the garment away upon the end of his walking-stick. The lover turned pale, and could not speak.

"*Der teufel!* For a poor man you have, it seems, a well-filled travelling purse! Ah! *you* never play!"

"Never, sir."

"Indeed! Pray, then, if your gold be not the fruit of the gaming-table, whence comes it?"

"I know not. You will not believe me, I am aware; but I swear that I speak the truth. This gold comes here, I know not how. This is the fourth time I have found it upon my table. I know not why it is here, who brings it, or how it is brought. By my honour as a gentleman and a soldier — by all my hopes of happiness in this life or the next, I am utterly ignorant of everything about it!"

"This is too much!" cried the baron, furiously. "Do you take me for an idiot or a dotard? Good

morning to you, sir, and I hope I may never see your face again!"

He slammed the door violently behind him, and went away down the stairs, leaving poor Von Steinberg utterly overwhelmed and broken-hearted.

"Cursed gold!" he exclaimed, dashing it upon the floor in his anger, "what brought thee here, and why dost thou torment me!"

Then the poor fellow thought of Emma, and of how his last chance was wrecked; and he was so miserable, that he threw himself upon his bed, and wept bitterly. All at once he remembered that the baron had a sister, at Langenschwalbach; she, perhaps, would believe him, would intercede for him! He started up, resolved to go thither at once; hastily gathered together the scattered pieces of money; locked them up in the drawer with the rest; ran down to a neighbouring carriage-stand; hired a vehicle to convey him to the railway-station, and in less than half an hour was on his way. In about three hours he arrived. He passed nearly the whole day in trying to discover the lady's address, and, when he had found it, was told that she had been for the last two months at Vienna. It was a foolish journey, with disappointment at the end of it! He came back quite late in the evening to Ems, and entered his own room, utterly broken down by anxiety and fatigue.

In the meantime the baron, crimson with rage, had returned to his hotel, and told all the circumstances to his daughter. She would not believe in the guilt of her lover.

"He a gambler!" she exclaimed. "It is impossible!"

"But I saw the gold upon his table!"

"He says he knows nothing of it, and he never told an untruth in his life. It will all be explained by-and-by."

"But I saw him playing at the tables!"

"It was some other who resembled him."

"Will you believe it, if you see him yourself?"

"I will, my father, and I will renounce him for ever. But not till then."

"Then you shall be convinced this evening."

The evening came, and the rooms were more than usually crowded. There was a ball in the *salon de danse;* supper in the ante-room; gaming, as usual, in the third apartment. The Baron von Hohendorf was there with his daughter and some friends. They made their way to the tables, but he whom they sought was not there. Eager faces enough were there around the board — faces of old women, cunning and avaricious; faces of pale dissipated boys, scarce old enough, one would have thought, to care for any games save those of the school-ground; faces of hardened, cool, determined gamblers; faces of girls, young and beautiful, and of men old and feeble. Strange table, around which youth, and beauty, age, deformity, and vice meet on equal ground!

Suddenly there was a movement at the farther end of the room; a whisper went round; the spectators made way, and the players drew aside for one

who now approached and took his place amongst them. This deference is shown only to those who play high and play frequently. Who is this noted gambler? Albert von Steinberg.

A cry of agony breaks from the pale lips of a young girl at the other end of the room. Alas! it is too surely he! He neither hears nor heeds anything around him. He does not even look towards her. He seats himself very quietly, as a matter of course; takes some *rouleaux* of gold and a packet of notes from his pocket; stakes a large sum; and begins to play with all the cool audacity of one whose faith in his own luck is unshakeable, and who is perfect master of the game. Besides this, he carried his self-command to that point which is only attained by years of practice. It was splendid to see him so impassive. His features were fixed and inexpressive as those of a statue; the steady earnestness of his gaze had something terrible in it; his very movements were scarcely those of a man liable to human frailties and human emotions; and the right hand with which he staked and swept up the gold, was stiff and passionless as that of the commandant in *Don Giovanni.*

The baron could contain his indignation no longer. Leaving his daughter with her friends, he made his way round the tables, and approached the young man's chair. He extended his hand to seize the player's arm, when his own was forcibly caught and held back. He turned, and saw a celebrated Prussian physician standing beside him.

"Stop, for heaven's sake!" he exclaimed. "Do

not speak to him. You know not the injury you might do him!"

"That is exactly my object. I'll spoil his game for him, the unprincipled hypocrite!"

"You will kill him."

"Absurd!"

"I am perfectly serious. Look at him. He sleeps! A sudden shock might be his death. You cannot see this, but I can. I have studied this thing narrowly, and I never beheld a more remarkable case of somnambulism."

The physician continued for some time conversing with the baron in an under tone. Presently the bank gave the signal; the players rose; the tables closed for that evening; and the Count von Steinberg, gathering up his enormous winnings, pushed back his chair and left the rooms, passing close before the baron without seeing him.

They followed him down the street to his own door. He entered by means of his latchkey, and closed it behind him without a sound. There was no light in his window — no one stirring in the house. None but those two had seen him enter.

The next morning, when he awoke, he found a larger pile of gold than ever on his table. He counted it with a shudder, and told over 44,000 florins.

Again there came a knock at his chamber-door. This time he did not even attempt to conceal the money; and when the baron and physician entered, he was too unhappy even to feel surprise at the sight of a stranger.

"You have again come to tell me that I am a gambler!" he exclaimed, despairingly, as he pointed to the gold, and leaned his head listlessly upon his hands.

"I say it, Count, because I saw it," replied the baron; "but at the same time I come to entreat your pardon for what passed at our last interview. You have gambled; but you are no gambler."

"Yes," interrupted the physician; "for somnambulists often perform the very actions which they would most abhor, if in a waking condition. But you are not a confirmed somnambulist. Yours is a mere functional derangement, and I can easily cure you. But, perhaps," he added, smiling, "you do not wish to lose so profitable a malady. You may become a *millionaire*."

"Nay, doctor!" cried the count, "I place myself in your hands. Cure me, I entreat you!"

"Well, well, there is time enough for that," said the baron. "First of all, let us shake hands, and be friends."

"I have so great a horror of play," replied the involuntary gambler, "that I shall instantly restore this money to the bank. See, here are, altogether, 130,000 florins!"

"Take my advice, Albert," said the baron, "and do no such thing. Suppose that in your sleep you had lost 130,000 florins, do you think the bank would have restored it to you? No, no; entertain no such scruples. Your father lost more than thrice that sum at those very tables, — it is but a restitution in part. Keep your florins, and return with me

to my hotel, where Emma is waiting to receive you. You have 130,000 there. I will excuse the other 70,000 upon which I formerly insisted, and you can make it up in love. Are you content; or must you restore the money to the bank?"

History has not recorded the lover's reply; at all events, he quitted Ems that same day in company with the Baron von Hohendorf and his pretty daughter. The prescriptions of the learned physician have, it is said, already effected a cure, and the *Frankfort Journal* announces the approaching marriage of Fräulein von Hohendorf with Albert, Count Steinberg.

CHAPTER X.

NUMBER THREE.

I AM a plain man, and you may not dislike to hear a plain statement of facts from me. Some of those facts lie beyond my understanding. I do not pretend to explain them. I only know that they happened as I relate them, and that I pledge myself for the truth of every word of them.

I began life roughly enough, down among the Worcestershire Potteries. I was an orphan; and my earliest recollections are of a great porcelain manufactory, where I helped about the yard, picked up what halfpence fell in my way, and slept in a harness-loft over the stable. Those were hard times; but things bettered themselves as I grew older and stronger, especially after George Barnard had come to be foreman of the yard.

George Barnard was a Wesleyan — we were mostly dissenters in the Potteries — sober, clear-headed, somewhat sulky and silent, but a good fellow every inch of him, and my best friend at the time when I most needed one. He took me out of the yard, and set me to the furnace-work. He entered me on the books at a fixed rate of wages. He helped me to pay for a little cheap schooling four nights a week; and he led me to go with him on Sundays to the chapel down by the river-side, where I first saw

Leah Payne. She was his sweetheart, and so pretty that I used to forget the preacher and everybody else when I looked at her. When she joined in the singing, I heard no voice but hers. If she asked me for the hymn-book, I used to blush and tremble. I believe I worshipped her, in my stupid ignorant way; and I think I worshipped Barnard almost as blindly, though after a different fashion. I felt I owed him everything. I knew that he had saved me, body and mind; and I looked up to him as a savage might look up to a missionary.

Leah was the daughter of a plumber, who lived close by the chapel. She was twenty, and George about seven or eight-and-thirty. Some captious folks said there was too much difference in their ages; but she was so serious-minded, and they loved each other so earnestly and quietly, that, if nothing had come between them during their courtship, I don't believe the question of disparity would ever have troubled the happiness of their married lives. Something did come, however; and that something was a Frenchman, called Louis Laroche. He was a painter on porcelain, from the famous works at Sèvres; and our master, it was said, had engaged him for three years certain, at such wages as none of our own people, however skilful, could hope to command. It was about the beginning or middle of September when he first came among us. He looked very young, was small, dark, and well-made; had little white soft hands, and a silky moustache; and spoke English nearly as well as I do. None of us liked him; but that was only natural, seeing how he was put over

the head of every Englishman in the place. Besides, though he was always smiling and civil, we couldn't help seeing that he thought himself ever so much better than the rest of us; and that was not pleasant. Neither was it pleasant to see him strolling about the town, dressed just like a gentleman, when working hours were over; smoking good cigars, when we were forced to be content with a pipe of common tobacco; hiring a horse on Sunday afternoons, when we were trudging afoot; and taking his pleasure as if the world was made for him to enjoy, and us to work in.

"Ben, boy," said George, "there's something wrong about that Frenchman."

It was on a Saturday afternoon, and we were sitting on a pile of empty seggars against the door of my furnace-room, waiting till the men should all have cleared out of the yard. Seggars are deep earthen boxes in which the pottery is put, while being fired in the kiln.

I looked up inquiringly.

"About the Count?" said I; for that was the nickname by which he went in the pottery.

George nodded, and paused for a moment with his chin resting on his palms.

"He has an evil eye," said he, "and a false smile. Something wrong about him."

I drew nearer, and listened to George as if he had been an oracle.

"Besides," added he, in his slow quiet way, with his eyes fixed straight before him as if he was thinking aloud, "there's a young look about him that isn't

natural. Take him just at sight, and you'd think he was almost a boy; but look close at him — see the little fine wrinkles under his eyes, and the hard lines about his mouth, and then tell me his age, if you can! Why, Ben, boy he's as old as I am, pretty near; ay, and as strong, too. You stare; but I tell you that, slight as he looks, he could fling you over his shoulder as if you were a feather. And as for his hands, little and white as they are, there are muscles of iron inside them, take my word for it."

"But, George, how can you know?"

"Because I have a warning against him," replied George, very gravely. "Because, whenever he is by, I feel as if my eyes saw clearer, and my ears heard keener, than at other times. Maybe it's presumption, but I sometimes feel as if I had a call to guard myself and others against him. Look at the children, Ben, how they shrink away from him; and see there, now! Ask Captain what he thinks of him! Ben, that dog likes him no better than I do."

I looked, and saw Captain crouching by his kennel with his ears laid back, growling audibly, as the Frenchman came slowly down the steps leading from his own workshop at the upper end of the yard. On the last step he paused; lighted a cigar; glanced round, as if to see whether any one was by; and then walked straight over to within a couple of yards of the kennel. Captain gave a short angry snarl, and laid his muzzle close down upon his paws, ready for a spring. The Frenchman folded his arms deliberately, fixed his eyes on the dog, and stood calmly smoking. He knew exactly how far he dared

go, and kept just that one foot out of harm's way. All at once he stooped, puffed a mouthful of smoke in the dog's eyes, burst into a mocking laugh, turned lightly on his heel, and walked away, leaving Captain straining at his chain, and barking after him like a mad creature.

Days went by, and I, at work in my own department, saw no more of the Count. Sunday came — the third, I think, after I had talked with George in the yard. Going with George to chapel, as usual, in the morning, I noticed that there was something strange and anxious in his face, and that he scarcely opened his lips to me on the way. Still I said nothing. It was not my place to question him; and I remember thinking to myself that the cloud would all clear off as soon as he found himself by Leah's side, holding the same book, and joining in the same hymn. It did not, however, for no Leah was there. I looked every moment to the door, expecting to see her sweet face coming in; but George never lifted his eyes from his book, or seemed to notice that her place was empty. Thus the whole service went by, and my thoughts wandered continually from the words of the preacher. As soon as the last blessing was spoken, and we were fairly across the threshold, I turned to George, and asked if Leah was ill?

"No," said he, gloomily. "She's not ill."

"Then why wasn't she ....?"

"I'll tell you why," he interrupted impatiently. "Because you've seen her here for the last time. She's never coming to chapel again."

"Never coming to chapel again?" I faltered, laying my hand on his sleeve in the earnestness of my surprise. "Why, George, what is the matter?"

But he shook my hand off, and stamped with his iron heel till the pavement rang again.

"Don't ask me," said he, roughly. "Let me alone. You'll know soon enough."

And with this he turned off down a by-lane leading towards the hills, and left me without another word.

I had had plenty of hard treatment in my time; but never, until that moment, an angry look or syllable from George. I did not know how to bear it. That day my dinner seemed as if it would choke me; and in the afternoon I went out and wandered restlessly about the fields till the hour for evening prayers came round. I then returned to the chapel, and sat down on a tomb outside, waiting for George. I saw the congregation go in by twos and threes; heard the first psalm-tune echo solemnly through the evening stillness: but no George came. Then the service began, and I knew that, punctual as his habits were, it was of no use to expect him any longer. Where could he be? What could have happened? Why should Leah Payne never come to chapel again? Had she gone over to some other sect, and was that why George seemed so unhappy?

Sitting there in the little dreary churchyard, with the darkness fast gathering around me, I asked myself these questions over and over again, till my brain ached; for I was not much used to thinking

about anything in those times. At last, I could bear to sit quiet no longer. The sudden thought struck me that I would go to Leah, and learn what the matter was, from her own lips. I sprang to my feet, and set off at once towards her home.

It was quite dark, and a light rain was beginning to fall. I found the garden-gate open, and a quick hope flashed across me that George might be there. I drew back for a moment, hesitating whether to knock or ring, when a sound of voices in the passage, and the sudden gleaming of a bright line of light under the door, warned me that some one was coming out. Taken by surprise, and quite unprepared for the moment with anything to say, I shrank back behind the porch, and waited until those within should have passed out. The door opened, and the light streamed suddenly upon the roses and the wet gravel.

"It rains," said Leah, bending forward and shading the candle with her hand.

"And is as cold as Siberia," added another voice, which was not George's, and yet sounded strangely familiar. "Ugh! what a climate for such a flower as my darling to bloom in!"

"Is it so much finer in France?" asked Leah, softly.

"As much finer as blue skies and sunshine can make it. Why, my angel, even your bright eyes will be ten times brighter, and your rosy cheeks ten times rosier, when they are transplanted to Paris. Ah! I can give you no idea of the wonders of Paris — the broad streets planted with trees, the palaces,

the shops, the gardens! — it is a city of enchantment."

"It must be, indeed!" said Leah. "And you will really take me to see all those beautiful shops?"

"Every Sunday, my darling — Bah! don't look so shocked. The shops in Paris are always open on Sunday, and everybody makes holiday. You will soon get over these prejudices."

"I fear it is very wrong to take so much pleasure in the things of this world," sighed Leah.

The Frenchman laughed, and answered her with a kiss.

"Good night, my sweet little saint!" said he, as he ran lightly down the path, and disappeared in the darkness. Leah sighed again, lingered a moment, and then closed the door.

Stupefied and bewildered, I stood for some seconds like a stone statue, unable to move, scarcely able to think. At length, I roused myself, as it were mechanically, and went towards the gate. At that instant a heavy hand was laid upon my shoulder, and a hoarse voice close beside my ear, said: —

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

It was George. I knew him at once, in spite of the darkness, and stammered his name. He took his hand quickly from my shoulder.

"How long have you been here?" said he, fiercely. "What right have you to lurk about, like a spy in the dark? God help me, Ben — I'm half mad. I don't mean to be harsh to you."

"I'm sure you don't," I cried, earnestly.

"It's that cursed Frenchman," he went on, in a voice that sounded like the groan of one in pain. "He's a villain. I know he's a villain; and I've had a warning against him ever since the first moment he came among us. He'll make her miserable, and break her heart some day — my pretty Leah — and I loved her so! But I'll be revenged — as sure as there's a God in heaven, I'll be revenged!"

His vehemence terrified me. I tried to persuade him to go home; but he would not listen to me.

"No, no," he said. "Go home yourself, boy, and let me be. My blood is on fire: this rain is good for me, and I am better alone."

"If I could only do something to help you ...."

"You can't," interrupted he. "Nobody can help me. "I'm a ruined man, and I don't care what becomes of me. The Lord forgive me! my heart is full of wickedness, and my thoughts are the promptings of Satan. There go — for heaven's sake, go. I don't know what I say, or what I do."

I went, for I did not dare refuse any longer; but I lingered awhile at the corner of the street, and watched him pacing to and fro, to and fro, in the driving rain. At length I turned reluctantly away, and went home.

I lay awake that night for hours, thinking over the events of the day, and hating the Frenchman from my very soul. I could not hate Leah. I had worshipped her too long and too faithfully for that; but I looked upon her as a creature given over to destruction. I fell asleep towards morning, and

woke again shortly after daybreak. When I reached the pottery, I found George there before me, looking very pale, but quite himself, and setting the men to their work the same as usual. I said nothing about what had happened the day before. Something in his face silenced me; but seeing him so steady and composed, I took heart, and began to hope he had fought through the worst of his trouble. By-and-by the Frenchman came through the yard, gay and off-hand, with his cigar in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets. George turned sharply away into one of the workshops, and shut the door. I drew a deep breath of relief. My dread was to see them come to an open quarrel; and I felt that as long as they kept clear of that all would be well.

Thus the Monday went by, and the Tuesday; but still George kept aloof from me. I had sense enough not to be hurt by this. I felt he had a good right to be silent, if silence helped him to bear his trial better; and I made up my mind never to breathe another syllable on the subject, unless he began.

Wednesday came. I had overslept myself that morning, and came to work a quarter after the hour, expecting to be fined; for George was very strict as foreman of the yard, and treated friends and enemies just the same, instead of blaming me, however, he called me up, and said: —

"Ben, whose turn is it this week to sit up?"

"Mine, sir," I replied. (I always called him "Sir" in working hours.)

"Well, then, you may go home to-day, and the

same on Thursday and Friday; for there's a large batch of work for the ovens to-night, and there'll be the same to-morrow night and the night after."

"All right, sir," said I. "Then I'll be here by seven this evening."

"No, half-past nine will be soon enough. I've some accounts to make up, and I shall be here myself till then. Mind you are true to time, though."

"I'll be as true as the clock, sir," I replied, and was turning away when he called me back again.

"You're a good lad, Ben," said he. "Shake hands."

I seized his hand and pressed it warmly.

"If I'm good for anything, George," I answered with all my heart, "it's you who have made me so. God bless you for it!"

"Amen!" said he in a troubled voice, putting his hand to his hat.

And so we parted.

In general, I went to bed by day when I was attending to the firing by night; but this morning I had already slept longer than usual, and wanted exercise more than rest. So I ran home; put a bit of bread and meat in my pocket; snatched up my big thorn stick; and started off for a long day in the country. When I came home, it was quite dark and beginning to rain, just as it had begun to rain at about the same time that wretched Sunday evening; so I changed my wet boots, had an early supper and a nap in the chimney-corner, and went down to the works at a few minutes before half-past nine. Arriving at the factory gate, I found it ajar, and so

walked in and closed it after me. I remember thinking at the time that it was unlike George's usual caution to leave it so; but it passed from my mind next moment. Having slipped in the bolt, I went straight over to George's little counting-house, where the gas was shining cheerfully in the window. Here, also, somewhat to my surprise, I found the door open, and the room empty. I went in. The threshold and part of the floor were wetted by the driving rain. The wages-book was open on the desk, George's pen stood in the ink, and his hat hung on its usual peg in the corner. I concluded, of course, that he had gone round to the ovens; so, following him, I took down his hat and carried it with me, for it was now raining fast.

The baking-houses lay just opposite, on the other side of the yard. There were three of them, opening one out of the other; and in each, the great furnace filled all the middle of the room. These furnaces are, in fact, large kilns built of brick, with an oven closed in by an iron door in the centre of each, and a chimney going up through the roof. The pottery, enclosed in seggars, stands round inside on shelves, and has to be turned from time to time while the firing is going on. To turn these seggars, test the heat, and keep the fires up, was my work at the period of which I am now telling you.

Well! I went through the baking-houses one after the other, and found all empty alike. Then a strange, vague, uneasy feeling came over me, and I began to wonder what could have become of George. It was possible that he might be in one of the

workshops; so I ran over to the counting-house, lighted a lantern, and made a thorough survey of the yards. I tried the doors; they were all locked as usual. I peeped into the open sheds; they were all vacant. I called "George! George!" in every part of the outer premises; but the wind and rain drove back my voice, and no other voice replied to it. Forced at last to believe that he was really gone, I took his hat back to the counting-house, put away the wages-book, extinguished the gas, and prepared for my solitary watch.

The night was mild, and the heat in the baking-rooms intense. I knew, by experience, that the ovens had been overheated, and that none of the porcelain must go in for at least the next two hours; so I carried my stool to the door, settled myself in a sheltered corner where the air could reach me, but not the rain, and fell to wondering where George could have gone, and why he should not have waited till the time appointed. That he had left in haste was clear — not because his hat remained behind, for he might have had a cap with him — but because he had left the book open, and the gas lighted. Perhaps one of the workmen had met with some accident, and he had been summoned away so urgently that he had no time to think of anything; perhaps he would even now come back presently to see that all was right before he went home to his lodgings. Turning these things over in my mind, I grew drowsy, my thoughts wandered, and I fell asleep.

I cannot tell how long my nap lasted. I had

walked a great distance that day, and I slept heavily; but I awoke all in a moment, with a sort of terror upon me, and, looking up, saw George Barnard sitting on a stool before the oven door, with the firelight full upon his face.

Ashamed to be found sleeping, I started to my feet. At the same instant, he rose, turned away without even looking towards me, and went out into the next room.

"Don't be angry, George!" I cried, following him. "None of the seggars are in. I knew the fires were too strong, and —"

The words died on my lips. I had followed him from the first room to the second, from the second to the third, and in the third — I lost him!

I could not believe my eyes. I opened the end door leading into the yard, and looked out; but he was nowhere in sight. I went round to the back of the baking-houses, looked behind the furnaces, ran over to the counting-house, called him by his name over and over again; but all was dark, silent, lonely, as ever.

Then I remembered how I had bolted the outer gate, and how impossible it was that he should have come in without ringing. Then, too, I began again to doubt the evidence of my own senses, and to think I must have been dreaming.

I went back to my old post by the door of the first baking-house, and sat down for a moment to collect my thoughts.

"In the first place," said I to myself, "there is but one outer gate. That outer gate I bolted on the

inside, and it is bolted still. In the next place, I searched the premises, and found all the sheds empty, and the workshop-doors padlocked as usual on the outside. I proved that George was nowhere about, when I came, and I know he could not have come in since, without my knowledge. Therefore it is a dream. It is certainly a dream, and there's an end of it."

And with this I trimmed my lantern and proceeded to test the temperature of the furnaces. We used to do this, I should tell you, by the introduction of little roughly moulded lumps of common fire-clay. If the heat is too great, they crack; if too little, they remain damp and moist; if just right, they become firm and smooth all over, and pass into the biscuit stage. Well! I took my three little lumps of clay, put one in each oven, waited while I counted five hundred, and then went round again to see the results. The two first were in capital condition, the third had flown into a dozen pieces. This proved that the seggars might at once go into ovens One and Two, but that number Three had been over-heated, and must be allowed to go on cooling for an hour or two longer.

I therefore stocked One and Two with nine rows of seggars, three deep on each shelf; left the rest waiting till number Three was in a condition to be trusted; and, fearful of falling asleep again, now that the firing was in progress, walked up and down the rooms to keep myself awake. This was hot work, however, and I could not stand it very long; so I went back presently to my stool by the door, and

fell to thinking about my dream. The more I thought of it, the more strangely real it seemed, and the more I felt convinced that I was actually on my feet, when I saw George get up and walk into the adjoining room. I was also certain that I had still continued to see him as he passed out of the second room into the third, and that at that time I was even following his very footsteps. Was it possible, I asked myself, that I could have been up and moving, and yet not quite awake? I had heard of people walking in their sleep. Could it be that I was walking in mine, and never waked till I reached the cool air of the yard? All this seemed likely enough, so I dismissed the matter from my mind, and passed the rest of the night in attending to the seggars, adding fresh fuel from time to time to the furnaces of the first and second ovens, and now and then taking a turn through the yards. As for number Three, it kept up its heat to such a degree that it was almost day before I dared trust the seggars to go in it.

Thus the hours went by; and at half-past seven on Thursday morning, the men came to their work. It was now my turn to go off duty, but I wanted to see George before I left, and so waited for him in the counting-house, while a lad named Steve Storr took my place at the ovens. But the clock went on from half-past seven to a quarter to eight; then to eight o'clock; then to a quarter-past eight — and still George never made his appearance. At length, when the hand got round to half-past eight, I grew weary of waiting, took up my hat, ran home, went

to bed, and slept profoundly until past four in the afternoon.

That evening I went down to the factory quite early; for I had a restlessness upon me, and I wanted to see George before he left for the night. This time, I found the gate bolted, and I rang for admittance.

"How early you are, Ben!" said Steve Storr, as he let me in.

"Mr. Barnard's not gone?" I asked, quickly; for I saw at the first glance that the gas was out in the counting-house.

"He's not gone," said Steve, "because he's never been."

"Never been?"

"No: and what's stranger still, he's not been home either, since dinner yesterday."

"But he was here last night."

"Oh yes, he was here last night, making up the books. John Parker was with him till past six; and you found him here, didn't you, at half-past nine?"

I shook my head.

"Well, he's gone, anyhow. Good night!"

"Good night!"

I took the lantern from his hand, bolted him out mechanically, and made my way to the baking-houses, like one in a stupor. George gone? Gone without a word of warning to his employer, or of farewell to his fellow-workmen? I could not understand it. I could not believe it. I sat down bewildered, incredulous, stunned. Then came hot tears,

doubts, terrifying suspicions. I remembered the wild words he had spoken a few nights back; the strange calm by which they were followed; my dream of the evening before. I had heard of men who drowned themselves for love; and the turbid Severn ran close by — so close, that one might pitch a stone into it from some of the workshop windows.

These thoughts were too horrible. I dared not dwell upon them. I turned to work, to free myself from them, if I could; and began by examining the ovens. The temperature of all was much higher than on the previous night, the heat having been gradually increased during the last twelve hours. It was now my business to keep the heat on the increase for twelve more; after which it would be allowed, as gradually, to subside, until the pottery was cool enough for removal. To turn the seggars, and add fuel to the two first furnaces, was my first work. As before, I found number three in advance of the others, and so left it for half an hour, or an hour. I then went round the yard; tried the doors; let the dog loose; and brought him back with me to the baking-houses, for company. After that, I set my lantern on a shelf beside the door, took a book from my pocket, and began to read.

I remember the title of the book as well as possible. It was called "Bowlker's Art of Angling," and contained little rude cuts of all kinds of artificial flies, hooks, and other tackle. But I could not keep my mind to it for two minutes together; and at last I gave it up in despair, covered my face with my hands, and fell into a long, absorbing, painful

train of thought. A considerable time had gone by thus — maybe an hour — when I was roused by a low whimpering howl from Captain, who was lying at my feet. I looked up with a start, just as I had started from sleep the night before, and with the same vague terror; and saw, exactly in the same place and in the same attitude, with the firelight full upon him — George Barnard!

At this sight, a fear heavier than the fear of death fell upon me, and my tongue seemed paralysed in my mouth. Then, just as last night, he rose, or seemed to rise, and went slowly out into the next room. A power stronger than myself compelled me, reluctantly, to follow him. I saw him pass through the second room — cross the threshold of the third — walk straight up to the oven — and there pause. He then turned, for the first time, with the glare of the red firelight pouring out upon him from the open door of the furnace, and looked at me, face to face. In the same instant, his whole frame and countenance seemed to glow and become transparent, as if the fire were all within him and around him — and in that glow he became, as it were, absorbed into the furnace, and disappeared!

I uttered a wild cry, tried to stagger from the room, and fell insensible before I reached the door.

When I next opened my eyes, the grey dawn was in the sky; the furnace doors were all closed as I had left them when I last went round; the dog was quietly sleeping not far from my side; and the men were ringing at the gate, to be let in.

I told my tale from beginning to end, and was laughed at, as a matter of course, by all who heard it. When it was found, however, that my statements never varied, and, above all, that George Barnard continued absent, some few began to talk it over seriously, and among those few, the master of the works. He forbade the furnace to be cleared out, called in the aid of a celebrated naturalist, and had the ashes submitted to a scientific examination. The result was as follows:

The ashes were found to have been largely saturated with some kind of fatty animal matter. A considerable portion of those ashes consisted of charred bone. A semi-circular piece of iron, which had evidently once been the heel of a workman's heavy boot, was found, half fused, at one corner of the furnace. Near it, a tibia bone, which still retained sufficient of its original form and texture to render identification possible. This bone, however, was so much charred, that it fell into powder on being handled.

After this, not many doubted that George Barnard had been foully murdered, and that his body had been thrust into the furnace. Suspicion fell upon Louis Laroche. He was arrested, a coroner's inquest was held, and every circumstance connected with the night of the murder was as thoroughly sifted and investigated as possible. All the sifting in the world, however, failed either to clear or to condemn Louis Laroche. On the very night of his release, he left the place by the mail train, and was never seen or

heard of there, again. As for Leah, I know not what became of her. I went away myself before many weeks were over, and never have set foot among the Potteries from that hour to this.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PATAGONIAN BROTHERS.

We are not related. His name is John Griffiths, and I am William Waldur; and we called ourselves the Patagonian Brothers, because it looked well in the bills and pleased the public. We met by chance, about six years since, on the race-course at Doncaster, and so took a sort of mutual liking, and went partners in a tour through the midland counties. We had never seen or heard of each other up to that time; and though we became good friends, were never greatly intimate. I knew nothing of his past life, nor he of mine; and I never asked him a question on the subject. I am particular to have this all clear from the beginning; for I am a plain man telling a plain story, and I want no one to misunderstand a word of what I am about to relate.

We made a little money by our tour. It was not much; but it was more than either of us had been able to earn before; so we agreed to stay together, and try our fortune in London. This time we got an engagement at Astley's for the winter, and, when the summer came, joined a travelling circus, and roamed about as before.

The circus was a capital thing — a republic, so to say, in which all were equals. We had a manager

to whom we paid a fixed salary, and the rest went shares in the profits. There were times when we did not even clear our expenses; there were towns where we made ten and fifteen pounds a-night; but the bad luck went along with the good, and, on the whole, we prospered.

We stayed with the company two years and a half in all, and played at every town between York and London. During that time we had found leisure to improve. We knew each other's weight and strength now to a hair, and grew bolder with experience; so that there was scarcely a new feat brought out anywhere which we did not learn, even to the "perche" business, and the trick of walking, head downwards, on a marble ceiling. The fact is, that we were admirably matched, which, in our profession, is the most important point of all. Our height was the same, to the sixteenth of an inch, and we were not unlike in figure. If Griffiths possessed a little more muscular strength, I was the more active, and even that difference was in our favour. I believe that, in other respects, we suited each other equally well, and I know that, for the three years and a half which we had spent together (counting from our first meeting at Doncaster down to the time when we dissolved partnership with the circus folks) we had never had an angry word. Griffiths was a steady, saving, silent fellow enough, with little gray eyes, and heavy black brows. I remember thinking, once or twice, that he was not quite the sort of person I would like for an enemy; but that was in reference to no act of his, and only

a fancy of my own. For myself, I can live with any one who is disposed to live with me, and love peace and good-will better than anything in the world.

We had now grown so expert, that we resolved to better ourselves and return to London, which we did somewhere about the end of February, or the beginning of March, eighteen hundred and fifty-five. We put up at a little inn in the Borough; and, before a week was over, found ourselves engaged by Mr. James Rice of the "Belvidere Tavern," at a salary of seven pounds a-week. Now, this was a great advance upon all our previous gains; and the Tavern was by no means a bad place for the founding of a theatrical reputation.

Situated half-way between the West-end and the City, surrounded by a densely populated neighbourhood, and lying in the very path of the omnibuses, this establishment was one of the most prosperous of its class. There was a theatre, and a concert-room, and a garden, where dancing, and smoking, and rifle-shooting, and supper-eating was going on from eight till twelve o'clock every night all through the summer, which made the place a special favourite with the working-classes.

Here, then, we were engaged (Griffiths and I), with a promise that our salary should be raised if we proved attractive; and raised it soon was, for we drew enormously. We brought out the perche and the ceiling business; came down in the midst of fireworks, from a platform higher than the roof of the theatre; and, in short, did everything that ever yet was done in our line — ay, and did it well, too,

though perhaps it is not my place to say so. At all events, the great coloured posters were pasted up all over the town; and our salary was increased to fifteen pounds a-week; and the gentleman who writes about the plays in the Sunday Snub, was pleased to observe that there was no performance in London half so wonderful as that of the Patagonian Brothers; for which I take this opportunity to thank him kindly.

We lodged (of course together) in a quiet street on a hill near Islington. The house was kept by Mrs. Morrison, a respectable, industrious woman, whose husband had been a gasfitter at one of the theatres, and who was now left a widow with one only daughter just nineteen years of age. She was very good, and very pretty. She was christened Alice, but her mother called her Ally, and we soon fell into the same habit; for they were very simple, friendly people, and we were soon as good friends as if we had all been living together in the same house for years.

I am not a good hand at telling a story, as, I daresay, you have found out by this time — and, indeed, I never did sit down to write one out before — so I may as well come to the point at once, and confess that I loved her. I also fancied, before many weeks were over, that she did not altogether dislike me; for a man's wits are twice as sharp when he is in love, and there is not a blush, or a glance, or a word, that he does not contrive to build some hope upon. So one day, when Griffiths was out, I went

downstairs to the parlour, where she was sitting by the window, sewing, and took a chair beside her.

"Ally, my dear," said I, stopping her right hand from working, and taking it up in both of mine; "Ally, my dear, I want to speak to you."

She blushed, and turned pale, and blushed again, and I felt the pulses in her little soft hand throbbing like the heart of a frightened bird, but she never answered a syllable.

"Ally, my dear," said I, "I am a plain man. I am thirty-two years of age. I don't know how to flatter like some folks, and I have had but very little book-learning to speak of. But, my dear, I love you; and though I don't pretend that you are the first girl I ever fancied, I can truly say that you are the first I ever cared to make my wife. So, if you'll take me, such as I am, I'll be a true husband to you as long as I live."

What answer she made, or whether she spoke at all, is more than I can undertake to tell, for my ideas were all confused; but I only remember that I kissed her, and felt very happy, and that, when Mrs. Morrison came into the room, she found me with my arm clasped round my darling's waist.

I scarcely know when it was that I first noticed the change in John Griffiths; but that it was somewhere about this time, I am tolerably certain. It is hard to put looks into words, and to make account of trifles that, after all, are matters of feeling more than matters of fact; but others saw the change as well as myself, and no one could help observing that he grew to be more silent and unsociable than

ever. He kept away from home as much as possible. He spent all his Sundays out, starting away the first thing after breakfast, and not coming back again till close upon midnight. He even put an end to our old friendly custom of walking home together after our night's work was over, and joined a sort of tap-room club that was kept by a dozen or so of idle fellows belonging to the theatre. Worse than this, he scarcely exchanged a word with me from morning till night, even when we were at meals. He watched me about the room as if I had been a thief. And sometimes, though I am sure I never wronged him willingly in my life, I caught him looking at me from under those black brows of his, as if he hated me.

More than once I laid my hand upon his sleeve as he was hurrying away on Sundays, or turning off towards the club room at night, and said, "Griffiths, have you got anything against me?" — or, "Griffiths, won't you come home to a friendly glass with me to-night?" But he either shook me off without a word, or muttered some sulky denial that sounded more like a curse than a civil answer; so I got tired of peace-making at last, and let him go his own way, and choose his own company.

The summer was already far advanced, and our engagement at the Belvidere had well-nigh ended, when I began to buy the furniture, and Ally to prepare her wedding things. Matters continued the same with John Griffiths; but, when the day was fixed, I made up my mind to try him once again, and invite him to the church and the dinner. The

circumstances of that invitation are as clear in my memory as if the whole affair had taken place this morning.

It was on the twenty-ninth of July (I am particular about dates), and there had been a general call to rehearsal at one o'clock that day. The weather was warm and hazy, and I started early that I might not go in late or tired; for I knew that, what with the rehearsal, and the new piece, and the Terrific Descent, I should have enough to do before my day's work was over. The consequence was, that I arrived about twenty minutes too soon. The gardens had a dreary look by daylight; but they were pleasanter, anyhow, than the theatre; so I loitered up and down among the smoky trees, and watched the waiters polishing the stains off the tables in the summer-houses, and thought how shabby the fountains looked when they were not playing, and what miserable gim-crack concerns were the Stalactite Caves and the Cosmoramic Grottoes, and all the other attractions which looked so fine by the light of coloured lamps and fireworks.

Well, just as I was sauntering on, turning these things over in my mind, whom should I see in one of the summer-houses but John Griffiths. He was lying forward upon the table, with his face resting upon his clasped hands, sound asleep. An empty ale-bottle and glass stood close beside him, and his stick had fallen near his chair. I could not be mistaken in him, though his face was hidden; so I went up and touched him smartly on the shoulder.

"A fine morning, John?" says I. "I thought I

was here early; but it seems that you were before me, after all."

He sprang to his feet at the sound of my voice, as if he had been struck, and then turned impatiently away.

"What did you wake me for?" he said, sullenly.

"Because I have news to tell you. You know that the sixth of August will be our last night here. . . . . Well, mate, on the seventh, please God, I'm going to be married, and . . . ."

"Curse you!" he interrupted, turning a livid face upon me, and an eye that glared like a tiger's. "Curse you! How dare you come to me with that tale, you smooth-faced hound? — to me, of all men living?"

I was so little prepared for this burst of passion, that I had nothing to say; and so he went on:

"Why can't you let me alone? What do you tempt me for? I've kept my hands off of you till now . . . ."

He paused and bit his lip, and I saw that he was trembling from head to foot. I am no coward — it's not likely that I should be a Patagonian Brother if I was. But the sight of his hatred seemed to turn me, for the moment, quite sick and giddy.

"My God!" said I, leaning up against the table, "what do you mean? Are you mad?"

He made no answer; but looked straight at me, and then walked away. I don't know how it was; but from that moment I knew all. It was written, somehow, in his face.

"Oh! Ally, dear!" I said to myself with a kind of groan, and sat down on the nearest bench; I believe that, at that moment, I scarcely knew where I was, or what I was doing.

I did not see him again till we met on the stage, about an hour afterwards, to go through our scene in the rehearsal. It was a grand piece, with a great deal of firing, and real water, and a live camel in the last act; and Griffiths and I were Mozambique slaves, performing before the Rajah in the Hall of Candelabras. Excepting that it cost a great deal of money, that is all I ever knew about the plot; and, upon my word, I don't believe that anybody else knew much more. By this time I had, of course, recovered my usual composure; but I could see that Griffiths had been drinking, for his face was flushed and his balance unsteady. When the rehearsal was over, Mr. Rice called us into his private room and brought out a decanter of sherry, with which, I must say, he was always as liberal as any gentleman could be.

"Patagonians," says he, for he had a wonderfully merry way with him, and always called us by that name, "I suppose you would make no objection to a little matter of extra work and extra pay on the sixth — just to end the season with something stunning — hey?"

"No, no, sir, not we," replied Griffiths, in a sort of hearty manner that wasn't natural to him. "We're ready for anything. Is it the flying business you spoke about the other day?"

"Better than that," said the manager, filling up

the glasses. "It's a new French feat that has never yet been done in this country, and they call it the trapeze. Patagonians, your health!"

So we drank his in return, and Mr. Rice explained all about it. It was to be an exhibition of posturing and a balloon ascent both in one. At some distance below the car was to be secured a triangular wooden framework, which framework was called the trapeze. From the lower pole, or base of this triangle, one of us was to be suspended, with a ligature of strong leather attached to his ankle, in case of accidents. Just as the balloon was rising and this man ascending head-downwards, the other was to catch him by the hands and go up also, having, if he preferred it, some band or other to bind him to his companion. In this position we were then to go through our customary performances, continuing them so long as the balloon remained in sight.

"All this," said Mr. Rice, "sounds much more dangerous than it really is. The motion of a balloon through the air is so steady and imperceptible, that, but for the knowledge of being up above the house-tops, you will perform almost as comfortably as in the gardens. Besides, I am speaking to brave men who know their business, and are not to be dashed by a trifle — hey, Patagonians?"

Griffiths brought his hand down heavily upon the table, and made the glasses ring again.

"I'm ready, sir," said he, with an oath. "I'm ready to do it alone, if any man here is afraid to go with me!"

He looked at me as he said this, with a sort of mocking laugh that brought the blood up into my face.

"If you mean that for me, John," said I, quickly, "I'm no more afraid than yourself; and, if that's all about it, I'll go up to-night!"

If I was to try from now till this day next year, I never could describe the expression that came over his face as I spoke those words. It seemed to turn all the currents of my blood. I could not understand it then — but I understood it well enough afterwards.

Well, Mr. Rice was mightily pleased to find us so willing, and a very few more words ended the matter. Mr. Staines and his famous Wurtemberg balloon were to be engaged; fifteen hundred additional coloured lamps were to be hired, and Griffiths and I were to receive twelve pounds a-piece for the evening, over and above our general salary.

Poor Ally! In the midst of the excitement I had forgotten her, and it was not till I was out of the theatre and walking slowly homewards that I remembered she must be told. For my own part, I did not believe there was the slightest danger; but I knew how her fears would magnify everything, and the nearer I came towards Islington the more uncomfortable I felt. After all, I was such a coward — for I always am a coward where women are concerned — that I could not tell her that day, nor even the next; and it was only on Sunday, when we were sitting together after dinner, that I found courage to speak of it. I had expected something

of a scene; but I had no idea that she would have taken on as she did, and I declare that, even then, if the posters had not been already out and myself bound in honour to act up to my engagement, I would have gone straight to Mr. Rice and declined the business altogether. Poor little, soft-hearted darling! it was a sore trial to her and to me also, and I was an inconsiderate idiot not to have thought of her feelings in the first instance. But there was no help for it now; so I gave her the only consolation in my power, by solemnly promising that I would be the first man tied to the trapeze. It was, of course, the safest position, and when I had assured her of this, she grew calmer. On all other points I kept my own counsel, as you may be certain; and as to John Griffiths, I saw less of him than ever. He even took his meals in the city now, and, during the seven days that elapsed between the twenty-ninth and the sixth, never once came face to face with me, except upon the stage.

I had a hard matter to get away from home when the afternoon of the sixth came round. My darling clung about me as if her heart would break, and although I did my best to cheer her, I don't mind confessing now that I went out and cried a tear or two in the passage.

"Keep up your spirits, Ally dear," says I, smiling and kissing her the last thing before I left the house. "And don't be spoiling your pretty eyes in that way. Remember that I want you to look well, and that we are to be married to-morrow."

The multitude in the Belvidere Gardens was something wonderful. There they were, men, women, and children, thronging the balconies, the orchestra-stairs, and every available inch of ground; and there, in the midst of them, rolled and swayed the huge Wurtemberg balloon, like a sleepy, lolling giant. The ascent was fixed for six o'clock, that we might come down again by daylight; so I made haste to dress, and then went to the green-room to see after Mr. Rice, and hear something of what was going forward.

Mr. Rice was there, and three gentlemen with him, namely, Colonel Steward, Captain Crawford, and Sydney Baird, Esquire. They were fine handsome looking gentlemen, all three — especially Sydney Baird, Esquire, who was, as I have since been told, a play-writer, and one of the cleverest men of the day. I was going to draw back when I saw them sitting there with their wine and cigars; but they would have me in to take a glass of port, and shook hands with me all round as polite as possible, and treated me as handsome as any gentlemen could.

"Here's health and success to you, my brave fellow," says Colonel Steward, "and a pleasant trip to us all!" and then I found that they were going up in the car with Mr. Staines.

And now, what with their light cheerful ways and pleasant talking, and what with the glass of wine that I had taken, and the excitement, and the hum of voices from the crowd outside, I was in first-rate spirits, and as impatient to be off as a

racer at the starting-point. Presently one of the gentlemen looked at his watch.

"What are we waiting for?" said he. "It is ten minutes past six already."

And so it was. Ten minutes past the hour, and Griffiths had not yet been seen or heard of. Well, Mr. Rice grew very uneasy, and the crowd very noisy, and so twenty minutes more went by. Then we made up our minds to go without him, and Mr. Rice made a little speech and explained it to the people; and then there was a cheer, and a great bustle; and the gentlemen took their seats in the car; and a hamper full of champagne and cold chicken was put in with them; and I was made fast by one leg to the base of the trapeze; and Mr. Staines was just about to get in himself, and give the signal to cut loose, when who should we see forcing his way through the crowd but Griffiths.

Of course there was another cheer at this, and a delay of eight or ten minutes more while he was dressing. At last he came, and it was now just a quarter to seven o'clock. He looked very sullen when he found that he was to be the undermost; but there was no time to change anything now, even if I had been willing; so his left wrist and my right were bound together by a leathern strap, the signal was given, the band struck up, the crowd applauded like mad, and the balloon rose straight and steady above the heads of the people.

Down sank the trees and the fountains, and the pavement of upturned faces. Down sank the roof of the theatre, and fainter grew the sound of

the hurrahing and the music. The sensation was so strange, that for the first moment I was forced to close my eyes, and felt as if I must fall, and be dashed to pieces. But that soon passed away, and by the time we had risen to about three hundred feet I was as comfortable as if I had been born and bred in the air with my head downwards.

Presently we began our performances. Griffiths was as cool as possible — I never saw him cooler — and we went through every conceivable attitude; now swinging by our hands, now by our feet, now throwing summersaults one over the other. And during the whole of this time the streets and squares seemed to sink away to the right, and the noises from the living world died on the air — and, as I turned and slung, changing my position with every minute, I caught strange flitting glimpses of the sunset and the city, the sky and the river, the gentlemen leaning over the car and the tiny passengers swarming down below like ants on an ant-hill.

Then the gentlemen grew tired of leaning over, and began to talk and laugh, and busy themselves over their hamper. Then the Surrey hills drew nearer, and the city sank away to the right, farther and farther. Then there were nothing but green fields with lines of railways crossing them here and there; and presently it grew quite damp and misty, and we ceased to see anything, except through breaks and openings in the clouds.

"Come, John," says I, "our share of this busi-

ness is done. Don't you think we might as well be getting into the car?"

He was hanging below just then, holding on by my two hands, and had been hanging so quite quiet for some minutes. He didn't seem to hear me; and no wonder, for the clouds were gathering about us so thickly, that even the voices of the gentlemen up above grew muffled, and I could hardly see for a yard before me in any direction. So I called to him again, and repeated the question.

He made no answer, but shifted his grasp from my hand to my wrist, and then up to the middle of my arm, so raising himself by degrees, till our faces came nearly on a level. There he paused, and I felt his hot breath on my cheek.

"William Waldur," said he hoarsely, "wasn't to-morrow to have been your wedding-day?"

Something in the tone of his voice, in the question, in the dusk and dreadful solitude, struck me with horror. I tried to shake off his hands, but he held too fast for that.

"Well, what if it was?" said I after a moment. "You needn't grip so hard. Catch hold of the pole, will you? and let go of my arms."

He gave a short hard laugh, but never stirred.

"I suppose we're about two thousand feet high," says he, and it seemed to me that he had something between his teeth. "If either of us was to fall, he'd be a dead man before he touched the ground."

I would have given the world at that moment to be able to see his face; but what with my own

head being downwards, and all his weight hanging to my arms, I had no more power than an infant.

"John!" I exclaimed, "what do you mean? Catch hold of the pole, and let me do the same. My head's on fire!"

"Do you see this?" said he, catching my arms a couple of inches higher up, and looking right into my face. "Do you see this?"

It was a large, open clasp-knife, and he was holding it with his teeth. His breath seemed to hiss over the cold blade.

"I bought it this evening — I hid it in my belt — I waited till the clouds came round and there was no soul to see. Presently I shall cut you away from the balloon. I took an oath that you should never have her, and I mean to keep it."

A dimness came over my eyes, and everything grew red. I felt that in another minute I should be insensible. He thought I was so already, and, letting my arms free, made a spring at the pole overhead.

That spring saved me. Our wrists were bound together, and as he rose he drew me along with him; for I was so faint and giddy that I could make no effort for myself.

I saw him hold by the pole with his left hand; I saw him take the knife in his right; I felt the cold steel pass between his wrist and mine, and then . . . .

And then, the horror of the moment gave me back my strength, and I clung to the framework just as the thong gave way.

We were separated now, and I was still secured to the trapeze by one ankle. He had only his arms to trust to — and the knife.

Oh, the deadly, deadly strife that followed! it sickens me to think of it. His only hope now lay in the cursed weapon; and so clinging to the woodwork with one hand, he strove to stab me with the other.

It was life or death now, and I grew desperate. To feel his murderous clutch upon my throat, and, in the silence of the hideous struggle, to hear the report of a champagne cork, followed by a peal of careless laughter, overhead . . . . Oh, it was worse than death, a hundred times over!

I cannot tell how long we clung thus, each with a hand upon the other's throat. It may have been only a few seconds; but it seemed like hours to me. The question was simply which should be strangled first.

Presently his gripe relaxed, his lips became dead-white, and a shudder ran through every fibre of his body. He had turned giddy!

Then a cry burst from him — a cry like nothing human. He made a false clutch at the trapeze, and reeled over. I caught him, just in time, by the belt round his waist.

"It's all over with me," he groaned between his set teeth. "It's all — over — with me! Take your revenge!"

Then his head fell heavily back, and he hung, a dead weight, on my arm.

I did take my revenge; but it was hard work,

and I was already half exhausted. How I contrived to hold him up, to unbind my foot, and to crawl, so laden, up the ropes, is more than I can tell; but my presence of mind never failed me for an instant, and I suppose the excitement gave me a sort of false strength while it lasted. At all events, I did it, though I now only remember climbing over the basket-work, and seeing the faces of the gentlemen all turned upon me as I sank to the bottom of the car, scarcely more alive than the burthen in my arms.

He is a penitent man now, an Australian settler, and, as I am told, well to do in those parts.

This is my story, and I have no more to tell.

CHAPTER XII.

MY DIAMOND STUDS.

"Diamonds of a most praised water." — PERICLES.

"SIR," said the stranger, "those studs are mine."

We were alone together, face to face. The train was flying on at the rate of thirty miles an hour. It was already verging towards evening, and we were about halfway between Liege and Brussels.

I shrank back into the farthest corner of my little compartment, and stared at him. His hair was dark, and hung in long loose locks; his eyes were wild and brilliant; and he wore an ample cloak with a high fur-collar. I thought the man must be mad, and I turned cold all over.

"Did you speak, sir?" I found courage to say.

"I spoke, sir. You wear a set of studs — diamonds set in coloured gold — very graceful design — stones of an excellent water; but — they are not yours."

"Not mine, sir?"

The stranger nodded.

I had purchased them only a week before. They captivated me from the window of a jeweller's shop in Berlin; and they cost me — no, I dare not say what they cost me, for fear my wife should chance to see this statement.

I took out my pocket-book, and handed the bill to the stranger.

"Sir," I said, "be pleased to read this little paper, and convince yourself that the studs are mine, and mine only."

He just glanced it over, and returned it to me.

"I see," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "that they appear to be yours by right of purchase; but nevertheless they belong to me by right of inheritance. I can make this clear to you very easily, if you choose to hear my story; and no doubt we shall presently contrive some plan by which to settle the question of ownership."

My heart sank within me at the cool certainty of his voice and countenance.

"Shall I go on?" he asked, lighting a cigar.

"Oh, by all means," I replied. "I shall be delighted."

He smiled ominously to himself; then sighed and shook his head; passed his fingers twice or thrice through his long locks; crossed his feet deliberately on the opposite cushions; and fixing his eyes full upon me, thus began:

"Though a native of Russia, and born in St. Petersburgh, I am of Hindoo descent. My grandfather belonged to the province of Hyderabad; but, travelling thence while yet a young man, established himself at Balaghaut, and became a worker in the great diamond-mines commonly known as the mines of Golconda. A grave, silent, unsociable man was my grandfather, and little beloved by his fellow-miners. The superintendent, however, placed great confidence in him; and by-and-by, being promoted to the situation of overseer, he married. The only

offspring of this union was Adjai Ghosal, my father. The Hindoos, as you must be aware, place a high value upon learning; and even the poorest evince such a respect for education as would do honour to the working-classes of a more enlightened community. Of this feeling no man in his position partook more largely than my grandfather. Uninstructed himself, he was ardently desirous that his son should benefit by advantages which, generally speaking, were accessible only to the wealthy; and in pursuance of this ambition, sent Adjai Ghosal, at the age of eleven years, to a large native academy at Benares. People wondered at first, and asked each other what the thing meant, and where the overseer found means to do it. 'Have you found a lac of rupees lately?' inquired one. 'Do you intend to make a diamond-merchant of the little Adjai?' asked another. But my grandfather only held his peace; and after a time the marvel died away, and was forgotten. And thus eleven more years passed on; and my father, at the age of twenty-two was summoned home to Balaghaut to receive the last benediction of his expiring parent. He found the old man stretched upon a mat, and almost speechless.

"'Adjai,' he murmured, — 'Adjai, my son, thou art arrived in time — in good time; for I could not have borne to die without seeing thee.'

"My father pressed his hand in silence, and turned his face aside.

"'Adjai,' said my grandfather, 'I have a terrible secret to confide to thee; one which my soul refuses to carry to the grave. Canst thou endure to hear it?

"My father urged him to speak.

"'It is to my own shame to reveal it to thee, Adjai; but I bow my head to the punishment. My son, I have sinned.'

"My father became more curious than ever.

"'Thou wilt not despise my memory, Adjai?'

"'By Brahma, no!' said my father, raising his hand to his head.

"'Then hearken.'

"The old miner lifted himself upon his elbow, and collected all his strength. My father knelt down and listened.

"'It happened,' said my grandfather, 'just three-and-twenty years ago, and I was then but a working-miner. I chanced one day upon a vein of extraordinary richness. My son, I was tempted. The evil one took possession of my soul — I secreted five diamonds. One was incalculably valuable — larger than a walnut, and, as far as I could judge, of admirable water. The other four were about the size of peas. Alas, Adjai! from that hour I was a miserable man. Many and many a time, I was on the point of confessing the theft; and was as frequently deterred by shame, fear, avarice, or ambition. I married; and a year after my marriage thou wert born. Then I resolved to dedicate this wealth to thee, and thee alone; to educate thee; to enrich thee; to make thee prosperous and learned; and never, never to profit in my own person by my sin."

"'Generous parent!' exclaimed my father, enthusiastically.

"'When I took thee to Benares, Adjai,' con-

tinued my grandfather, 'I sold one of the four smaller diamonds; and with this I have defrayed the expenses of thy education. I never spent one fraction of the sum upon myself; and some few golden mohurs of it are yet remaining.'

"'Indeed!' said my father, who was listening with the greatest attention. 'And the rest of the gems?'

"'The rest of the gems, Adjai, thou canst restore when I am gone.'

"'Restore!' echoed my father.

"'Yes, my child. Thou hast education. It will make thee far happier than the possession of ill-gotten riches; and I shall die in peace, knowing that reparation will be made. As for the few remaining mohurs, I think, if thou art not over-scrupulous in the matter, thou mightest almost be justified in keeping them. They will help thee to begin the world.'

"'Indeed!' said my father, with a curious sort of smile flitting about the corners of his mouth.

"At this moment the old man changed colour, and a shudder passed over him.

"'I — I have told thee just in time, Adjai,' he said falteringly. 'I feel that — that I have not many moments to live. Come hither, that I may give thee my blessing.'

"'My dear father,' said Adjai Ghosal, 'you have forgotten to tell me where the diamonds are hidden.'

"'True,' gasped the dying man. 'Thou wilt find them, my son — thou wilt find them . . . but

thou wilt be sure to restore them as soon as I am dead?'

"'How can I restore them,' said my father impatiently, 'unless you tell me where to find them?'

"'True — very true, my Adjai. Look, then, in the roll of matting which I use for a pillow, and there thou wilt find the three smaller gems and the large one. See — see the superintendent — Adjai — my — my . . .'

"A rapid convulsion, a moan, a heavy falling back of the outstretched hands, and my grandfather was dead."

The stranger broke off abruptly in his story, and laid his hand upon my sleeve.

"And now, sir," said he, "what do you suppose my father did?"

"Went into mourning, perhaps," said I, deeply interested.

"Nonsense, sir. He went to the roll of matting."

"And found the diamonds?"

"Not only *found* them, sir," said the stranger, laying his finger on his nose, — "not only found them; but — can't you guess?"

"Well, really," said I hesitating, "I — that is — if I should not be offending you by the supposition, I should guess — that he kept them."

"*Kept them*, sir! that's it," said the stranger, rubbing his hands triumphantly; "and, in my opinion, he was quite right too. Well, sir, to continue. As soon as my venerable ancestor had been consigned to the grave, my father left Balaghaut for Calcutta; and embarking there on board a Rus-

sian vessel, sailed for St. Petersburg. Arrived at that city, he consigned the gems to a skilful artist, by whom they were cut and polished. Sir, when cut and polished, it was found that the larger stone weighed no less than one hundred and ninety-three carats! My father knew that his fortune was made, and applied for an audience of the Empress Catherine II. The audience was granted, and the diamond shown; but the empress was unwilling to accede to my father's terms. He, believing that in time he should obtain his price, suffered the matter to drop; took a beautiful mansion overlooking the Neva; naturalised himself as a Russian subject, under the name of Peter Petroffski; and patiently bided his time. Thus nearly a twelvemonth passed; and my father, who had long since parted with the last of his golden mohurs, began to feel nervous. The event proved, however, that he had done wisely; for he one morning received a summons to the palace of Count Orloff, and sold his diamond to that nobleman for the sum of one hundred and four thousand one hundred and sixty-six pounds, thirteen shillings, and fourpence. Count Orloff was then Catherine's favourite; and to her, on her birthday, he presented this royal gift, some few days after he had made the purchase."

"Is it possible," I exclaimed, almost breathless with astonishment, — "is it possible that these are all facts?"

"Facts!" echoed the stranger indignantly. "Turn to the article on diamonds in any Encyclopædia, and convince yourself. Facts, indeed! Why, sir,

that inestimable gem now adorns the sceptre of Russia!"

"I beg your pardon," I said humbly; "pray go on, sir."

He seemed vexed, and remained silent; so I spoke again.

"In what year did this happen?"

"In the year 1772," he replied, falling back insensibly into his narrative. "My father now found himself in a position to command immense commercial influence; so he embarked a portion of his wealth in the fur trade, and became in process of time one of the foremost among the merchant-princes of Russia. During many years, he devoted himself entirely to the pursuit of riches; for gold, I must confess, was my father's weak point. At last, when he had obtained the reputation of being at the same time a millionnaire and an irreclaimable old bachelor, he married — married at sixty years of age, just thirty-eight years from the time when he left Balaghaut. The object of his choice was a rich widow, in every way suitable as regarded money and station; an excellent woman, and the best of mothers! I respect her memory."

Here the stranger paused, and wiped his eyes with a very fine cambric handkerchief, which filled the carriage with an overpowering perfume of patchouli. Presently, conquering his emotion, he resumed: —

"But for my birth, which took place within two years from the date of my father's wedding, the newly-created family of Petroffski must have become

extinct. As it was, therefore, my appearance was hailed with extravagant rejoicings. I was christened after my father, Peter Petroffski. My schoolfellows called me Peter the Second. I remember little of my boyhood, excepting that I always had plenty of roubles in my pocket; a pony; a mounted servant to attend me to and from school; and plenty of indulgence from all my teachers. No boy in the academy played so many pranks, or was so readily forgiven as myself; but money covers a multitude of sins, especially at St. Petersburg."

He paused for a moment, and a question which had long suggested itself to my mind, now rose to my lips.

"You have not yet told me," said I, "what your father did with the three smaller diamonds."

"Sir," replied the stranger, "I am coming to that presently."

So I bowed and waited in silence.

"From school I went to college; and, as my father's position excluded me from the college of nobles, I travelled into Germany, and studied for five years at the University of Heidelberg."

"'Peter,' said my father, as we parted, 'remember what a priceless life is yours. Above all things, my darling son, be careful not to injure your health by over-application.'

"Never was good advice more scrupulously followed. My studies at Heidelberg were pleasant rather than profound, and consisted chiefly of rowing, drinking, and fighting. By dint of strict attention to these duties, I earned for myself the rank of a

"mossy head;" and, indeed, I may say that I graduated in Bavarian beer, and took out my degree in sabre-cuts. At length I reached the age of twenty-one, and returned to St. Petersburg just in time for my birthday. On this occasion my father threw his house open for a succession of dinner-parties, balls, and suppers. On the morning of the great day, he called me into his study, signifying that he had something to say, and something to give to me. A small morocco case of triangular form was lying on his desk. From the moment I entered the room I felt convinced that this was intended for me; and my attention, I fear, wandered sadly away from the wise and affectionate discourse which my father (leaning back complacently in his great arm-chair) was pleased to bestow upon me. He said a great deal about the extent of his trade, and the satisfaction it was to him to have brought up a son who should succeed him in it; informed me that from this day I was to fill the position of junior partner, with a munificent share in the yearly profits; and finally, taking up the morocco case, bade me accept that as an earnest of his parental love. I opened it, and beheld a superb set of diamond studs. Each stone was a brilliant of the purest water, and about the size of an ordinary pea. Their value, I felt convinced, could not be less than three hundred guineas of your English money. For some moments I was speechless with delight and astonishment, and could scarcely stammer forth a word of thanks. Then my father smiled, and told me the history which I have just related to you. I had never heard

anything of this before. I knew only the common story current in the city, that my father had been a great Eastern merchant before he settled in Russia, and that he had sold a wonderful diamond to the Empress Catherine many years ago. If, therefore, I had been amazed before, I was now still more so, and listened to the narrative like a man in a dream.

"'And now, my dear boy,' said my father in conclusion, 'these diamonds, as I daresay you have already guessed, are the three remaining stones which I took from your grandfather's pillow of matting just sixty years ago.'

"From this time I led an enviable life. I owned the handsomest *droschky*, the finest horses, and the smallest tiger in St. Petersburg. My pleasure-yacht was the completest that lay alongside the quays of the Neva. My stall at the opera was next to that of young Count Skampsikoff, the great leader of fashion and folly, and close under the box of Prince Ruffantuff, who was at that time one of our most influential nobles, and Generalissimo of the Russian army. It was not long before Skampsikoff and I became the firmest friends in the world; and before six months were over, I was known far and near as the fastest, the richest, and the most reckless scape-grace about town.

"It was at this period, sir, that I first beheld the peerless Katrina."

The stranger paused, as if he expected me to be surprised; but finding that I only continued to

listen with a countenance indicative of polite attention, he looked at his watch, ran his fingers through his hair, hemmed twice or thrice, and then went on with his story.

"You will ask me, perhaps, — who was the peerless Katrina? Sir, she was a violet blooming upon a rock; a rainbow born out of the bosom of a thunder-cloud. She was the dream, the poetry, the passion of my life! Katrina, sir, was the only child of Prince Ruffantuff, whose name I have already mentioned. Strange that the fairest, the most ethereal of beings, should come of so stern a parentage! As Katrina was the gentlest of women, and the most loving, so was Ivan Ruffantuff the fiercest of soldiers and the severest of fathers. He carried the discipline of the camp into the privacy of his home, and made himself dreaded as much by his household as by his troops. I never saw so forbidding a countenance, or one more expressive of pride and defiance. Gazing upon the delicate creature seated beside him in his box, one wondered how nature could have played so strange a turn, and sought in vain for the faintest trace of apparent consanguinity between them. Prince Ivan was a giant in stature; Katrina was almost childlike in the graceful slightness of her proportions. Prince Ivan was swarthy of complexion, and his features were moulded after the flat unintellectual type of the Tatar tribes; Katrina's features were regular, classical, and Greek. Prince Ivan was proud and cruel; Katrina was loving, innocent — born for all purposes of tenderness and womanly compassion. What marvel, then, that I loved her?

Loved her, sir, as only few can love — loved her with all the force, and self-abandonment, and passion, of which man's nature is capable. I had never been in earnest before, but I was in earnest now — hopelessly in earnest, as I well knew; but despair itself fed my love with fresh energy, and obstacles only served to make me more determined. For a long time I loved her with my eyes and heart alone, as a devotee worships a saint upon an altar. I could but gaze upon her from afar. I had never even listened to the sound of her dear voice, though I would have died only to hear her pronounce my name. Night after night, during the whole opera-season, I sat and watched her from my stall. I heard no more of the music than if I had been in Siberia; I grew thin, and pale, and abstracted; I fell into a listless dreaming mood, and replied at random when spoken to; above all, I wandered like a ghost in and out of the *salons* and gaming-rooms, where I had of late been so eager in the pursuit of pleasure. At last Skampsikoff came to my rooms one morning, and remonstrated with me upon my unaccountable despondency.

"'You don't do justice to *me*, my dear fellow,' he said, twirling his moustachios. 'I have introduced you, set you going, made you, in point of fact, the fashion; and I take it rather unkindly that you should reflect so glaring a discredit upon my judgment. You might as well be at La Trappe, as far as your conversational powers go at present; and as for your looks, why, hang it, you know the least a man can do for society is to look pleasant. Are you

in debt, or does the dear papa draw his purse-strings too closely?'

"I shook my head. I had no debts but such as I could readily liquidate, and my father was as liberal to me as I could reasonably desire. It was not that.

"'Not that!' exclaimed Skampsikoff, 'well, then, you must be in love. Why, man, you blush! The thing's as clear as the sunlight; and Peter, the magnificent Peter, is in love! Now, by all the saints, this is too ridiculous! Who's the girl?'

"'The Princess Katrina,' I answered with a groan.

"Skampsikoff started, and whistled dismally.

"'The Princess Katrina!' he repeated.

"I laid my head down upon the table, and burst into tears.

"'I know that I am a fool,' I said, sobbing. 'I know that I have no chance — no hope — no resource but exile or death; and yet I love her, O, I love her, and I am dying — dying — dying, day by day!'

"My friend was moved.

"'Cheer up, Petroffski,' he said, laying his hand upon my shoulder. 'Cheer up; for I think I know of a plan by which to gain you an interview with her; and that once done, why, you must accomplish the rest for yourself. You will throw yourself at her feet. You will propose an elopement, or a secret marriage. She will not have the heart to refuse you. We will set relays of horses for you on the road to the nearest seaport; you will embark on board a

schooner, ready hired for the purpose; and, once off and away, who is to follow? Come, come, I see nothing but success for you; and if you will but look a trifle more lively, I'll set out at once to see about the ways and means.'

"I felt as if night had turned to day on hearing these words.

"'Shampsikoff,' I said, 'you have saved my life!'

"That evening, to my surprise, I saw him enter Prince Ruffantuff's box in company with a nobleman of his acquaintance, and be presented in due form both to Ivan and his daughter. He did not remain there very long, but contrived to enter into conversation with Katrina. Just before he left the box, he nodded to me and waved his hand. She instantly raised her glass. They exchanged a few sentences. She looked again; and I felt as if the whole theatre were turning round. In a few moments he had made his bow, taken his leave, and returned to his stall by my side.

"'The ball is rolling,' he said, rubbing his hands gaily; 'the ball is rolling, and the game's begun. She saw me recognise you, and naturally asked me who you were. 'A fellow,' said I, 'with the best heart and the handsomest studs in St. Petersburg.' 'Of horses?' asked the fair Katrina. 'No,' said I; 'of diamonds.' Whereupon she looked again. 'Not but that he has horses, too,' I added, 'and plenty of them. He's a noble fellow, and my most intimate friend; but he is far from happy.' She surveyed you with more interest than ever. There's nothing

like telling a woman that a man's unhappy. She's sure to be half in love with him directly. 'He looks pale,' said the fair Katrina. 'What is the cause of his sorrow?' I smiled and shook my head. 'Princess Katrina,' I said meaningly, '*you* are the very last person in the world to whom I could confide that secret.' With this I took my leave; and I think you ought to be very much obliged to me.'

"And I was very much obliged to him, especially when I saw that Katrina's attention wandered continually that evening from the stage to myself. Once or twice our eyes met. The first time she started; the second time, she blushed; and I thought myself the happiest fellow in the world.

"Henceforth, life assumed for me a new and beautiful aspect. Somehow or another (whether through the hints dropped by my friend, or her own attentive study of my eloquent glances, I know not) the fair Katrina became aware of my passion, and was not so cruel as to discourage it. Sometimes, when they stood near me in the crush-room, she would drop her handkerchief or her fan, that I might have the opportunity of handing it to her. Sometimes she left a flower from her bouquet lying upon the front of her box, that I might go round and take it when she and her father were gone. At last she accorded me an interview."

The stranger buried his face in his hands, and sighed heavily.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, in a broken voice. "My — my emotions on recalling this portion of my

history are so overwhelming, that (with your permission) I must smoke a cigar."

I have, be it known, a particular aversion to the odour of tobacco. To speak plainly, it disagrees with me. However, in this instance I waved my objections; the stranger lit his Havanna; and presently the story of my diamond-studs went on.

"Those only who have loved," said the stranger, "can picture the condition of my mind during the hours that preceded that eventful interview. I could think of nothing, speak of nothing, but Katrina. To me the universe was all Katrina, and there was only nothingness beyond. Dusk came at last — the dusk of a winter's evening, when the tinkling bells of the *droschky*-horses, and the guttural 'Yukh, yukh!' of the drivers, rose from the streets and public squares, where the snow lay thickly. Then dusk turned rapidly to night; the frosty stars came out; and I wrapped myself in my cloak of furs, and went forth alone on foot.

"Swiftly and silently I traversed the few thoroughfares that separated our dwellings; and, gliding along by the wall at the back of Prince Ivan's gardens, stationed myself in a deep angle of shadow, and waited patiently. Presently a small side-door opened, and an old woman, closely muffled, looked out.

"'What art thou doing there?' she asked in a shrill tremulous tone.

"'Waiting for the sun to shine,' I replied in the words of the signal which we had previously agreed upon.

"The woman extended her hand to me, led me

in, closed the door, and so guided me in utter darkness through a long passage. Presently I saw a thread of brilliant light; then a door was thrown suddenly open, and I found myself in a brilliantly lighted apartment. Here my conductress desired me to wait, and hobbled out of the room. A quarter of an hour elapsed thus. I counted the seconds by a time-piece on a console-table; but every minute seemed to be the length of an hour. At last the door opened. I turned — I fell at her feet — it was Katrina!

"For some moments neither of us spoke. I do not now recollect which first broke the delicious silence; but I believe it was myself. The remembrance of what was said has altogether passed away from me. It seems to me now like a dream, or the dream of a dream, so bright, so far away, so unsubstantial!

"There was a fauteuil close at hand. I placed her in it; I knelt down before her; I bent my head upon her knees, and covered her little hands with kisses. And so we told each other the story of our love, — a broken, faltering story, interrupted by exclamations and questions, tears and kisses; but the sweetest that is told by human lips.

"Suddenly, — while I was yet kneeling at her feet, while my arm clasped her waist, and one of her dear hands rested on my head, — we heard voices close at hand.

"'Her highness,' said one, 'is in her boudoir overlooking the terrace.'

"'Good,' replied another, at which we both shuddered. 'You need not announce me.'

"'Alas!' cried Katrina, in an agony of terror, 'it is my father!'

"The heavy steps came nearer; I sprang to my feet; I encircled her with my arm, for she was about to fall; and before I could draw another breath the door flew open, and he entered.

"For one brief instant, surprise seemed to usurp every other feeling in Prince Ivan's breast. Then his stern features flushed crimson, and a terrible expression glared in his cruel eye. He was in full uniform, and (never stirring a foot from the threshold, where he had paused upon opening the door) plucked a pistol from his belt. Without a word, without a pause, he pointed the weapon at my head.

"There was an explosion, a piercing shriek, and —

"And Katrina — Katrina, my beloved, my adored, had flung herself between us, and received the deadly charge!

"I caught her as she fell, senseless and bleeding; I uttered wild words of hatred, of love, of despair, of cursing; I threw myself upon the ground beside her, and strove to stay the purple stream that gushed from her bosom. Alas, it was in vain! Before the smoke had cleared away, before Ivan himself well knew the deed he had committed, all was over, and the beautiful Katrina had passed away to that heaven for — for which — —"

The stranger's voice faltered, and, letting down

the window next to him, he leaned out for a few minutes in the evening air. When he drew in his head again, I offered him my pocket-flask of brandy. He emptied it at a draught, returned it to me with a long-drawn sigh, threw away the end of his cigar, and resumed: —

"You will forgive me, sir, if I hasten over this portion of my narrative. It is of a nature so agonising to my feelings, that I must content myself with merely stating a few leading facts, and passing on to subsequent events. Prince Ivan, struck with remorse and horror, solicited the emperor's leave to retire from the army, and entered a monastery near Moscow. I received an intimation from the Government that I should do well to travel for the next eight or ten years. It was a polite form of exile, to which I was compelled to accede, greatly to the sorrow of my parents. For my own part, I was utterly heart-broken, and cared little what became of me. I went direct to Paris, and plunged into a course of reckless dissipation. Billiards, race-horses, dinner-parties, betting, and follies of every description, soon brought upon me the expostulations of my family. But I was careless of everything — of health, fortune, reputation, — all. When my father refused any longer to supply my wilful extravagances, I incurred innumerable debts, and, giving no heed to the consequence, spent and drank, and gambled still. At length, by some unaccountable chance, a rumour got about that my father had disinherited me. From this moment I could find no more credit. My friends dropped off one by one; and, except by

a few blacklegs, and two or three goodnatured chums, I found myself deserted by all my former companions. And still, such was my infatuation, instead of reforming — instead of meriting my father's aid and forgiveness — I only sank lower and lower, and continued to tread the downward path of vice.

"An event, however, occurred which altogether changed the course of my career. I had been dining with some wild fellows at the *Maison Dorée*. After dinner, when we were all very nearly intoxicated, we called as usual for cards and dice. I soon lost the contents of my purse; then I staked my cabriolet, and lost it; my favourite horse, and lost him; my watch, chain, and seals, and lost them. On this, somewhat startled, I paused.

"'I'll play no more to-night,' I said doggedly.

"'Pshaw!' cried my antagonist. 'Throw again; next time you'll be sure to win.'

"But I shook my head and rose from the table.

"'I'm a beggar already,' said I, with a forced laugh.

"De Lancy shrugged his shoulders.

"'As you please,' he replied somewhat contemptuously. 'I only wanted you to have your revenge.'

"I turned back irresolutely.

"'Will you play for my house and furniture?' I asked.

"'Willingly.'

"So I sat down again, and in a few throws more found myself homeless. This time I was

reckless. I poured out a bumper of wine, and tossed it off at a draught.

"'If I had a wife,' I cried madly, 'I would stake her next; but I have nothing left now, gentlemen — nothing but wine, and liberty, and myself. As this is no slave-country, you won't play, I suppose, for the latter?'

"'Not I,' said De Lancy, sweeping his gains into his hat. 'I suppose you have no objection to make out that little statement of the house, cabriolet, and so forth, in writing, have you?'

"There was an easy, satisfied, sarcastic triumph in his tone that irritated me more than the loss of all the rest. I made no reply; but, tearing a leaf from my pocket-book, wrote hastily, and half threw the paper at him.

"'Take it, sir,' I said bitterly; 'and I wish you joy of your property.'

"He surveyed the acknowledgment coolly, put it in his purse, and said with a sneering smile: —

"'Does it not seem a pity now that you should have absolutely nothing left whereby to retrieve these things? Another throw, another billet of a hundred francs, and perhaps they would all be yours again. By the way, you forgot your diamond studs all this time. Will you try once more?'

"And he threw the dice as he spoke. They turned up sixes.

"'You might have thrown that, Petroffski,' he said, pointing to them.

"I was sorely tempted; but I resisted.

"'No, no,' I said, 'not my diamond studs. They are an heir-loom; and — and I will write to my father to-morrow.'

"'Like a penitent good little boy,' said De Lancy, with an impatient gesture. 'Nonsense, man; throw for the studs. I feel convinced you'll win.'

"'Say, rather, you feel convinced that *you'll* win, De Lancy. Have you not stripped me of enough already?'

"'Insolent!' he cried. 'Do you think I value the paltry winnings?'

"'I think you grasp all you can get.'

"'Liar!'

"The word had scarcely passed his lips, when I flung a glass of wine in his face. In another moment, all was confusion. Blows were exchanged, the table was overturned, the lights extinguished. I received a severe wound upon the temple from falling against the open door, and fainted.

"When I came to myself, I was stretched upon a sofa in an adjoining room, with a surgeon bending over me. The morning sun was streaming in at the windows. My companions were all gone, no one knew whither.

"'What is the matter,' I asked, faintly. 'Am I dying?'

"The surgeon shook his head.

"'You are severely hurt,' he said, 'but with care and quiet you will recover. Had I not better communicate with your friends?'

"'Write to my father,' I murmured. 'You will find his — his address in my pocket-book.'

"The surgeon took up pen and paper, and wrote immediately, partly from my dictation, and partly from his opinion of my condition. He then said that I must not be moved, and must, above all things, avoid excitement. As he uttered these words, and rose to take his leave, a sudden idea, or, rather, a sudden presentiment, struck me.

"I put up my hand to my bosom. *My diamond-studs were gone!*

"After this, I remember no more. The shock produced upon me that very effect which the surgeon had been so anxious to avoid. I lost consciousness again; and on being restored to life, passed into a state of delirious fever. For many weeks I lay upon the threshold of the grave; and when I at length recovered, it was to find my dear father and mother at my side. They had hastened over with succour and forgiveness, and to their tender cares I owed a second existence. As soon as my health was tolerably established, my father went back for a few weeks to Russia, disposed of his business, realized his fortune in money, and returned to France an independant man. This excellent parent did not long survive the change. Within two years from the period of his establishment in Paris he died; and my mother survived him only a few months. They left me to the enjoyment of a princely fortune, which former experience has taught me to use worthily. I neither drink nor gamble. I pass my life chiefly in travelling. I have never married, and I do not think

it likely that I ever shall marry; for Katrina is ever present in my heart, and when I lost her, I lost the power of loving. Since that period, fifteen years have elapsed. I have wandered through many lands: trodden the ruins of Thebes, and waked the echoes of Pompeii; shot the buffalo on the Western prairies, and pursued the wild-boar amid the forests of Westphalia. I am now on my way to Denmark; but purpose remaining a few days in Brussels, where probably I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again."

The stranger bowed as he said this, and I bowed in return.

"And now, sir," he continued, "from the night that I lost them in a scuffle at the *Maison Dorée*, till this evening when I behold them upon your shirt-front, I never saw those diamond studs again. I have sought for them, advertised them, offered rewards innumerable for them, during the space of fifteen years — but up to the present moment all has been in vain. Not for their intrinsic worth — for I could purchase plenty like them — but for the associations connected with them, do I place so high a value upon those stones. They are the same which my grandfather concealed in his pillow of matting; which my father gave to me upon my birthday; which first drew upon me the eyes of my lost Katrina. Surely, sir, you will acknowledge that this is a pardonable weakness, and also that the studs are really mine?"

"Your tale, sir," said I, politely, but firmly, "is indeed very surprising, and I may say very con-

clusive; but the case is so singular, the studs belong with so much apparent right to both of us, that I really think we must refer all decision on the point of ownership to the law. You cannot expect me to relinquish them without first ascertaining whether I really am compelled legally to do so."

"My dear sir," replied the stranger, "I had no idea of asking you to relinquish the studs without due compensation. If you will do me the favour once more to show me that little bill (the amount of which I have forgotten), I shall be delighted to give you a cheque for the same sum."

But I had no wish to part from my studs.

"Excuse me, sir," I said, somewhat uneasily, "but you have not yet proved to me that these stones are those of which you were robbed in the *Maison Dorée*. Make it evident to me that this is not a case of accidental resemblance, and . . ."

"Sir," interrupted the stranger, "when my father gave me those studs on my birthday, he caused my initials to be engraved in minute characters upon one of the facets at the back. To do this was a great expense. When done, it deteriorated, perhaps, from the market-value of the gems; but it made them infinitely more precious to me. If, sir, you will have the goodness to take them out of your shirt, I will show you the initials P. P. upon the under side."

By this time the train had reached the suburbs of Brussels, and in a few moments more we should arrive, I well knew, at the station.

"I think, sir," said I, "we had better defer this

examination till to-morrow. We have almost gained our destination; and by the feeble light of this roof-lamp I —"

The stranger brought out a small silver-box filled with wax-matches.

"By the light of one of these convenient little articles, sir," he said, "I will engage that you shall see the letters. I am most anxious to convince you of the identity of the stones. Pray, oblige me by taking them out."

I could no longer find any pretence for refusal. The studs were attached each to each by a slender chain, and to examine one I was forced to take out all. As I was doing this, the speed of the train slackened.

The stranger lit one of his matches, and I examined the stones in tremulous impatience.

"Upon my honour, sir," I said, very earnestly, "I can perceive nothing upon them."

"Had you not better put on your glasses?" asked the stranger.

"*Bruxelles?*" shouted the guard. "*Changement de convoie pour Gand, Bruges, et Ostend.*"

Hang the glasses! they were so misty I could not see an inch before me.

"Allow me to hold the studs for you while you rub them up," said the stranger, politely.

I thanked him, polished the glasses upon my sleeve, held them up to the light, put them on.

"Now, sir," I said, "you may light another match, and give me the diamonds."

The stranger made no reply.

"I will not trouble you, sir, to hold them any longer," I said.

I turned; I uttered a shriek of dismay; I stumbled over my own portmanteau, which stood between me and the doorway.

"*Monsieur veut descendre?*" said the guard, with a grin.

"Where is the stranger?" I cried, leaping out, and dancing frantically about the platform. "Where is the stranger? — where is Peter Petroffski? — where are my diamond-studs?"

"Has Monsieur lost anything?" asked the railway interpreter, touching his hat.

"He had my studs in his hand! I turned my back for a moment, and he was off! Did any one see him?"

"Will monsieur have the goodness to describe the person of this thief?"

"He was tall, thin, very dark, with black eyes and an aquiline nose."

"And long hair hanging down upon his shoulders?" asked the interpreter.

"Yes, yes."

"And he wore a large cloak with a high fur-collar?"

"The same — the very same."

The porters and bystanders smiled, and glanced meaningly at one another. The interpreter shrugged his shoulders.

"Every effort shall be made," he said, shaking his head; "but I regret to say that we have little prospect of success. This man's name is Vaudon.

He is an experienced swindler, and evades capture with surprising dexterity. It is not three weeks since he committed a similar robbery on this very line, and the police have been in pursuit of him ever since without effect."

"Then his name is not Peter Petroffski?"

"Certainly not, monsieur."

"And he is no Russian?"

"No more than I am."

"And — and his grandfather, who was a Hindoo — and the Empress Catherine — and the beautiful princess who was shot — and — and . . ."

"And monsieur may be assured," said the interpreter with a smile, "that whatever story was related to him by Pierre Vaudon was from beginning to end — a fiction!"

Quite chopfallen, I groaned aloud, and took my melancholy way to the Hotel de Ville. There I stated my case, and was assured that no pains would be spared on the part of the police to apprehend the offender.

No pains were spared, and no money either; but all was in vain. From that day to this I never set eyes upon my diamond studs.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GUARD-SHIP AT THE AIRE.

"At Christmas time," said the stranger in the chimney-corner, "folks seem to think themselves privileged to ask other folks to tell stories; but then it is not every man's vocation to tell stories. It comes especially hard on a plain man, who makes no pretence of knowing more than his neighbours. I am a plain man, and it comes hard upon me. I never wrote a page in a magazine, or a paragraph in a newspaper, in my life. How, then, can I be expected to tell a story?"

Having said which, the stranger relapsed into silence, and stared moodily at the fire.

On this particular evening, being Christmas Eve, and rather stormy, with a strong wind and mist blowing up from the sea, our gathering at the "Tintagel Arms" was somewhat smaller than usual. The stranger had dropped in about two hours before, stabled his horse, engaged his bed, and installed himself in the chimney-corner as comfortably as if he had been an old inhabitant of the place, and one of ourselves. Up to this moment, however, he had scarcely opened his lips, or taken his eyes from off the logs that blazed upon the hearth. We looked at each other, and no one seemed prepared with a reply.

"Besides," added the stranger, as if it were an afterthought, and wholly unanswerable, "the days of 'Arabian Nights' are over. We want facts in these times — facts, gentlemen — facts."

"And surely there are facts in the life of every individual," observed the schoolmaster, "which, if truthfully related, could not fail to impart both instruction and amusement. We prefer facts, sir; when we can get them. Indeed, I dare affirm that within the four walls of this parlour, many a poor seaman has, with his rude narrative of travel and peril, given us more genuine pleasure than could the best author of the best fiction that ever was written."

(The schoolmaster, I should observe, is the orator of our little society. He has seen better days, is a classical scholar, and has, at times, quite a parliamentary style. We are proud of him up at the "Tintagel Arms;" and he knows it.)

"Then do you mean to tell me," said the stranger testily, "that you impose this tax on every traveller who happens to put up at the house?"

"By no means, sir," replied the schoolmaster. "We only desire that every traveller who joins the society in this parlour should conform to the rules by which this society is governed. There is the coffee-room for whoever may prefer it."

"And those rules?"

"And those rules are, that each person present shall tell a story, sing a song, or read aloud for the amusement of the rest."

"Perhaps," suggested the landlord, "the gentleman would prefer to sing a song?"

"I can't sing," growled the traveller.

"Some visitors prefer to read a scene from Shakespeare," hinted the parish clerk.

"Might as well ask me to dance on the tight-rope," retorted the traveller, fiercely.

A dead silence ensued, in the midst of which the landlady brought in our customary bowl of punch, and the schoolmaster filled the glasses. The stranger tasted his punch, gave a nod of approval, drank the rest at a draught, and coughed uneasily.

"I can't sing," said he, after several minutes, during which no one had spoken; "and I can't read plays; and I can't tell stories. But if plain facts will do, I don't mind telling the company about an — an adventure, I suppose I may call it, that happened to myself one Christmas Eve, some two-and-thirty years ago."

"Sir," said the schoolmaster, "we shall be delighted."

"That's more than I was," retorted the traveller; "for it was just the most disagreeable affair that I ever went through in my life."

With this, he sent up his glass to be refilled; and, continuing to stare steadily into the fire, as if he was reading every word of his narrative from the pictures in the embers, thus began: —

"I am a commercial traveller, and have been on the road these last five-and-thirty years; that is to say, ever since I was twenty years of age. Mine is the Manchester line of business, and I have travelled in most parts of England and Wales, as well as in some parts of France and Germany, in my time.

At the period of which I am about to speak, I was in the employment of Warren, Gray, and Company (then a famous Manchester firm of half a century's standing), and my beat lay through the north of France, all about those parts which lie between Calais, Paris, and Cherbourg — a wide district, in the form of a great irregular angle, as you may see by the map.

"Well, as I have said, it was two-and-thirty years ago; or, if you like it better, Anno Domini 1830. William IV. had just become King of England, and Louis Philippe had just become King of the French. It was an exciting time. The Continent was all over in a restless, revolutionary state; and France, divided between Orleanists and Bourbons, Napoleonists and Republicans, was in a worse condition of fever and ferment than any of her neighbours.

"I hate politics, gentlemen. I am no politician now, and I was no politician then; but being a young fellow at that time, and better acquainted with the Continent than most Englishmen of my age and station (for people didn't travel abroad then as they do now), I gave myself great airs of superiority, and fancied I knew a vast deal about everything. When I was at home, I bragged about foreign life and manners; gave myself out as a wonderful judge of French wines; and loudly despised our homely English cookery. When I was abroad, on the contrary, I became violently national, boasted of British liberties, British arms, and British commerce, and never failed to avail myself, if possible, of a chance

allusion to Wellington, or Nelson, or Waterloo. In short, as I said before, I loved to assume airs of superiority, and that disposition by no means helped to make me popular. I was a fool for my pains, of course: and I suffered for it afterwards ... but I must not run in advance of my story.

"Having been in Paris (which, you will remember, was the farthest point inland of my district) all July and August, I began travelling northwards again in September, according to the commands of my employers. There was no Northern of France Railway at that time, and the traveller who was unprovided with his own vehicle had no choice between the lumbering diligence and the scarcely less lumbering *calèche*. I, however, had my own gig, which I had brought over from England, and a capital brown horse bought at Compiègne; and I well remember how I used to dash past the diligences, clatter into the towns, and endeavour to eclipse all the *commis voyageurs* whom I encountered on the road.

"Having left Paris in September, I calculated on getting through the whole work of my northern district in about ten weeks, and hoped to arrive in England in time for Christmas-day. The change of government, however, had given an unusual impetus to international trade, and I found business accumulating on my hands day by day, to such an extent, that I soon gave up all hope of reaching home before the latter end of January. As Christmas approached, and I continued travelling slowly in a north and north-westerly direction, I began to wonder

where my Christmas-day would be spent after all. At one time I thought it would be at Lisieux; at another at Caen; and at last I made sure it would be at Bayeux. I was mistaken, however, in all my conjectures, as you will hear presently.

"On the night of the 23rd of December, I slept at a populous little market town called Crépigny, which lies about eighteen miles inland, and about midway between Caen and Bayeux. On the morning of the 24th I rose unusually early, and started soon after daybreak; for I had a long day's journey before me, and hoped to reach Bayeux that night. I could not, however, take the direction road, being bound first for St. Angely, a small coast-town lying near the mouth of the Aire, just opposite Portsmouth on the map. My only chance, therefore, was to make a long day, and, if possible, leave St. Angely early enough to allow of my pushing on to Bayeux that afternoon. My route from Crépigny to St. Angely lay across a bleak open country thinly planted with orchards, and scattered over here and there with villages, farms, and desolate, half-ruined country-houses. A thick white frost lay like snow upon the landscape. A grey mist brooded over the horizon. A bitter wind swept every now and then across the plain, and shook the bare poplars that bordered the road on either side. Sometimes I passed a cart loaded with firewood, or a stout country wench in a warm cloak and sabôts; but I had all the road to myself, for the most part; and a very dreary road it was. It grew drearier, too, with every mile. Habitations became fewer and farther between. Every

blast of wind brought with it a cloud of fine white dust; and now and then, as I reached the summit of a little eminence, or turned the shoulder of a sand slope, I caught distant glimpses of the sea.

"It was about eleven o'clock in the morning when I neared the end of my first stage, and came in sight of St. Angely-sur-Aire; a melancholy river-side town, consisting of a singular irregular street about a mile in length, bordered by houses on one side and quays on the other.

"Having dashed along the quays, and pulled up, with my customary flourish, at the door of the principal inn, I alighted, ordered lunch, sent my horse to the stable, and went out into the town. I soon found, however, that there was no business to be done there. The place was too remote and too primitive; being peopled chiefly by small ship-owners, boat-builders, colliers, fishermen, and sailors. The inhabitants, besides, were not so friendly as in the more frequented towns. I could not help feeling that I was looked upon with disfavour as I walked along the streets. The children hooted after me. The shopkeepers were scarcely civil. It was evident that an Englishman was both an unusual and unwelcome visitor in the lonely little town of St. Angely-sur-Aire.

"Going back, in no pleasant frame of mind, to the *Cheval Blanc*, I found my lunch prepared in a corner of the public-room, beside a window overlooking the river. A large wood fire blazed upon the hearth; a coloured print of Napoleon at Marengo hung over the chimney-piece; and at a long oak

table in the centre of the sanded floor sat some five or six Frenchmen, drinking sour wine, smoking bad cigars, and playing dominoes.

"They looked up sullenly as I came in, and muttered among themselves. I could not distinguish what the words were; but I felt sure they related in some uncomplimentary manner to myself; and this, as you may well believe, did not help to make me more amiable. In short, being but a hot-tempered, conceited young fellow at the best of times, and being, moreover, on this occasion particularly annoyed by the reception I had met with in the town, I gave myself more airs than ever, found fault with the cutlets, abused the wine, worried the waiter, and made myself, I have no doubt, eminently disagreeable.

"'Call this Bordeaux, indeed!' said I, superciliously. 'In England we would not buy it for vinegar. Have you nothing better?'

"'Nothing, monsieur,' replied the waiter humbly. "'We keep only two qualities, and monsieur ordered the best.'

"'In England!' ejaculated one of the domino players — a shabby fellow in a faded uniform, who looked like a custom-house officer — 'Bah! What do they know about wine in England? They grow no grapes. They are thankful over there for the washings of our vats.'

"Stupid as the insult was, the blood rushed to my face, and tingled in my fingers. I longed to contradict the man; but it was of no use getting into a broil, if a little prudence would avert it. So

I held my tongue, and affected not to hear. His companions laughed, and presently he spoke again.

"'What can you expect,' pursued he, 'in a country where the land is all swamp, and the air all fog, and every man keeps a shop? Monsieur there, you see, doesn't know wine from vinegar. How should he? The English drink nothing but beer and tea!"

"I could bear it no longer.

"'Stop there, friend,' said I, boiling over with rage, but endeavouring to speak calmly. 'It's a pity you should allow yourself to express opinions upon a subject of which you know nothing.'

"'Did monsieur speak?'

"'I did speak. I said you expressed opinions on a subject of which you know nothing."

"'It appears to me, monsieur, that I have a right to express what opinions I please.'

"'Not when they are offensive to others.'

"'Pardon, monsieur — how could I tell that my opinions would offend? If I said that England was all swamp and fog, what then? Monsieur did not make the climate of his native country. If I said ...'

"'You know nothing about either our customs or our climate,' I interrupted, angrily.

"'And if I said that the English were a nation of shopkeepers,' pursued he, 'have I not the authority of the great Napoleon for that statement? Is not monsieur himself a commercial traveller?'

"The cool impertinence of the fellow, and the

undisguised amusement of his friends, enraged me beyond all the bounds of prudence.

"'Shopkeepers or not,' I retorted, 'we have beaten the French too often to care for a nickname! Were they shopkeepers who routed you at Trafalgar? Were they shopkeepers before whom your Old Guard turned and fled at Waterloo? Were they ——'

"My words were drowned in a torrent of imprecations. Furious and gesticulating, every Frenchman was instantly on his feet; whilst I, expecting nothing less than an immediate attack, snatched up a chair, and prepared for a desperate defence. At this moment, however, the landlord, alarmed by the noise, rushed in and placed himself between us.

"'Peace! peace, I say, gentlemen!' cried he. 'I allow no quarrelling here. What! six against one? I am ashamed of you!'

"'Death of my life! shall we be insulted by a beggarly Englishman?' stormed one.

"'Or suffer the honour of France to be called in question?' shouted another.

"'Or the memory of our *grande armée* to be reviled?' added a third.

"'Nonsense — nonsense!' expostulated the landlord. 'I'll bet a *louis d'or* that monsieur meant nothing of the kind. He is an Englishman; you are Frenchmen. You don't understand each other — *voilà tout!* Remember the duties of hospitality, gentlemen, and recollect that monsieur is a stranger. I'll be sworn that monsieur was not the first to begin.'

"'*Parbleu!* I was the first to begin — I confess

it,' said the customs officer, good-temperedly. 'I put monsieur out by abusing his country.'

"'And I confess that I lost my temper too easily,' replied I; 'and said much that I should be ashamed to repeat.'

"'Suppose, messieurs, you make your peace over another bottle of wine,' suggested the landlord, rubbing his hands.

"'With all my heart,' said I, 'if these gentlemen will allow me to call for one!'

"The Frenchmen laughed, stroked their moustachios, shook hands, and forgot their anger as readily as if nothing had happened — all except one, a bronzed, grey-bearded man in a blue blouse and gaiters, who pulled his cap angrily over his eyes, muttered something about *maudit Anglais*, and strode out of the room.

"'*Peste!* that old François is as savage as a bear,' said one of my late opponents.

"'He is an old soldier,' observed another, apologetically. 'He served under Napoleon, and he hates the English.'

"'I am really sorry if I have hurt the feelings of a brave man,' said I. 'Can we not induce him to come back and chink glasses with us?"

"'No — no; let him alone. He is a savage-tempered fellow, and best left to himself. Your health, monsieur, and a pleasant journey!'

"And with this, the good-natured *garçons* drew round the fire, pulled out their cigars, smacked their lips over their wine, and chatted away as pleasantly as if we had made each other's acquaintance under

the most agreeable auspices in the world. When the first bottle was emptied, I called for another, and by the time we had done justice to the second, it was nearly three o'clock in the afternoon, and fully time for me to begin my journey.

"'If monsieur is going to Crépigny,' said a young farmer, whom his companions called Adolphe, 'I will gladly take a seat in his chaise as far as the cross-roads.'

"'Unfortunately, I came from Crépigny this morning, and am now bound for Bayeux,' I replied.

"'For Bayeux? *Peste!* then monsieur has a good long road before him.'

"'How far do you call it? I did not think it was more than three leagues.'

"'Three leagues? — nearer five.'

"Five French leagues, and only another hour of daylight before me! That was more than I had bargained for.

"'Monsieur had better let his horse go back to the stable, and stay with us to-night at the *Cheval Blanc*,' suggested the landlord, obsequiously.

I shook my head.

"'No, no,' I said. 'That will never do. I want to spend my Christmas-day at Bayeux to-morrow. Five leagues, you say?'

"'Full five by the road,' answered the custom-house officer. 'But there is a shorter way, if monsieur can only find it.'

"'You would not send monsieur by the river?' interposed the landlord.

"'Why not? It will save him a good league.'

"'*Mon Dieu*, it is not safe for a stranger — especially after dusk!'

"'Safe, Maître Pierre! Why it's as safe as the high road when the tide is out,' replied the other, contemptuously. 'Listen, monsieur. About five kilometres from St. Angely, the Aire empties itself into the sea. It is but a narrow river, as you see it here — narrow and deep; but out there it gets wide and shallow; wider than the Seine at Paris. *Eh bien*, monsieur, about four kilometres from hence, and about one before you reach the mouth of the Aire, you come to a place called *L'Eau Perdu*. It is just an arm of the river — a reach in fact, which at high water feeds a small stream, over which you would have to cross by the bridge at Creuilly if you went round by the high road; but which, if you take the way by the coast, you can drive across as easily as possible when it is low tide. There is no danger in the world, monsieur may take my word for it; and it saves a *détour* of at least a league.'

"'Monsieur had much better not attempt it,' said mine host of the *Cheval Blanc*.

"'Nay, I am not afraid of attempting it, if I can but find my way,' replied I. "My horse is no longer fresh, and a league is a league.'

"'Monsieur cannot fail to go rightly,' said the custom-house officer. 'You drive straight forward, and take the first road to the left past the church. Follow that road till you come to a lane leading to a little inn called the *Bon Christophe*, and then ask any one to show you the best place to drive over. The house stands just on the brink of *L'Eau Perdu*,

and in sight of the mouth of the Aire. If it is dusk, there is always a light burning at the revenue station on the opposite side.'

"'A thousand thanks,' said I, jumping into my chaise, and gathering up the reins. 'You are quite sure the tide will be out?"

"'The tide is out now,' replied the custom-house officer, taking out his watch, 'and will not turn till ten minutes past four o'clock. If it had turned already, monsieur would still be in good time, for the reach does not fill till nearly high tide. Monsieur will have to drive over a quarter of a mile of muddy bottom. He will get his wheels dirty — *voilà tout!*'

"'I'm not afraid of that misfortune,' said I laughing. Adieu, gentlemen. May we soon meet again to pledge our goodwill in another bottle of Maître Pierre's Bordeaux!'

"With this and a profusion of bows, adieux, and good wishes, we parted; I driving off at a rapid pace that brought the inhabitants of St. Angely-sur-Aire to their windows as I rattled past, and my friends of the *Cheval Blanc* crowding round the threshold of that decent little hostelry, to do honour to my departure.

"I found my way easily enough past the church, and down the road to the left, along which I had been directed. It was not by any means a pleasant drive. The afternoon was dull and raw; the road was rough; the grey sea-mist thickened in the distance, and the wind was piercingly cold. The distance, too, proved greater than I had expected, and I was obliged, by the bad condition of the road, to

drive very slowly. In the meantime the mist continued to thicken and the light to fade, so that by the time I reached the lane it was almost dusk. Such a lane as it was, too! — rough as a ploughed field and wet as a pond, with stones over which the horse stumbled, and ruts into which the wheels sank at every yard. Bad as the road had been, it was nothing to this. However, it was too late to turn back, so I dismounted, led my horse, and endeavoured to make the best of my position. The lane terminated presently in a broad space of waste ground, in the midst of which I saw the dark outline of a house and the glimmer of a lighted casement. Concluding that this must be the *auberge* of the good Christopher, I at once turned my horse's head in that direction, and led him, as well as I could, over the uneven ground that lay between. As I drew near the house I heard voices; but it was not till I came within a yard or two of the gate on which they were leaning that I could distinguish the forms of the two men who were speaking.

"'Holà!' said I, 'is this the auberge, of the *Bon Christophe?*'

"'That it is, monsieur, and I am the landlord, at monsieur's service,' replied the shorter of the two, stepping forward and holding the gate open. 'Monsieur will please to enter? We have excellent beds — a good stable — every accommodation for travellers!'

"'Thanks; but I only want to be directed to the best place for driving over the reach here. The tide is out, I believe?"

"'Yes, monsieur, the tide is out — that is to say, it is just about to turn,' replied the landlord in a tone of disappointment.

"'And I can cross with safety?'

"The landlord hesitated.

"'Because, if not,' I added, suspecting that he would keep me if he could, 'I shall drive back at once to St. Angely-sur-Aire, and sleep at the *Cheval Blanc*.'

"'The reach is quite passable,' said the taller man, abruptly.

"'Oh, yes — it is passable,' admitted the landlord. 'Monsieur has but to drive straight for the light at the revenue-station. He cannot go wrong.'

"'Will you be so obliging, then, as to send some one just to put me in the right way?'

"'Certainly, monsieur; I will call . . .'

"'No need to call any one,' interposed the other. 'I am going by the beach. Follow me. Good night, friend Collet.'

"'Good night, François,' replied the landlord, somewhat sulkily. 'Be sure you explain to monsieur the difference between the two lights.'

"'Bah! do you take me for a fool?'

"Saying which, my guide pushed hastily forward, and I followed. It was too dark to see his features distinctly; but something in his height, in his gait, in the tone of his voice, struck me as not wholly unfamiliar. Then his name — the landlord called him François. Was not François the name of the old soldier whom I saw three hours since in the public room of the *Cheval Blanc?* It was quite

possible that he might be the same man. Nay, the more I thought of it, the more I felt sure of his identity. And what if he were the same? Was it worth while to allude to the *fracas* of the afternoon? Surely not. He did not seem to have recognized me, and it might only lead to further disagreement. I deemed it better, on the whole, to say nothing. These thoughts flashed through my mind in less time than it takes to relate them. Just as I came to my decision, I found we were descending a sandy slope, beyond which lay what seemed to be a wide tract of mud and shingle. Far away across this waste, showing dimly through the mist, and distant, apparently, about half a mile from each other, gleamed two lights, one red and one white. My guide halted suddenly.

"'*Voilà*,' said he. 'There are the two beacons — one on board the guard-ship at the mouth of the Aire; the other at the revenue-station across the reach. Do you see both?'

"'Yes, I see both plainly.'

"'Then drive straight for the red one.'

"'Thanks. Is the bottom tolerably level? Need I lead the horse?'

"'No; it is all smooth. Nothing but mud and sand.'

"'Thanks again, *mon ami*. Good night.'

"He made no answer, but turned and strode away, heavily and rapidly, into the darkness.

"I jumped into the chaise, wrapped a rug about my knees, lit a cigar, fixed my eyes steadily on the red light, and drove forward. In another moment,

the wheels went off the shingly slope, and we were going smoothly and noiselessly along the bed of the reach. It was not by any means bad driving. The bottom, though somewhat yielding on the surface, was firm enough an inch below it; and the little pools through which we splashed now and then, or the shells, which grated occasionally under the wheels, offered no obstacle to our progress.

"The air, too, was fresh and salt, with a pleasant perfume of the sea; and there was something exciting, after all, in driving out towards that red light, and remembering that in a few hours more it would be deep water in the channel between.

"All at once my horse neighed, and stood still. I spoke to him, stroked him gently with the whip, and succeeded in urging him forward some few yards farther, when he stopped again, more suddenly than before. It happened that we were at that moment in the midst of a pool deeper and more extensive than any through which I had yet driven; but for this I accounted by calculating that I had already traversed close upon half the distance, and that towards the mid-channel the deposit of water would naturally be somewhat greater. It was this, probably, that alarmed the horse. Whatever it was, however, I could not sit there for his pleasure; and so, finding persuasion useless, I administered three or four sharp cuts of the whip, which had the effect of making him start on again, though with evident reluctance.

"It was strange; but, driving forward thus and steering ever for the red light ahead, I observed

that the isolated pools had within the last few minutes become merged into one shallow sheet of water, extending under the wheels in every direction. In spite of myself, I grew nervous. Knowing that my best course must be to get out of the mid-channel as quickly as possible, I whipped the horse forward all the faster. Still the bottom seemed to decline lower and lower, and the water to rise higher at every yard. I looked eagerly round. The spot whence I had started was no longer distinguishable; but the red light, now larger and nearer than ever, glowed encouragingly through the mist. It was too late to turn back. Cost what it might, I *must* go forward!

"At this moment my horse, flung himself back upon his haunches, planted his fore-legs firmly in the sand, and refused to stir a step farther. Was this fear, or instinct? I dared not ask myself the question. I dared not avow the terrible suspicion that had been gaining upon me during the last few minutes. I gathered up the reins, rose in my seat, and lashed him as I had never lashed him yet since the day I bought him. He resisted, snorted, then dashed on desperately, though the pool by this time rose within an inch of his knees.

"And now, quite suddenly, I became aware that there was a ripple on the surface of the water. From that moment I gave myself up for lost. From that moment I knew that the tide was upon me!

"I am amazed to this hour when I remember how

calmly I took it. Every nerve, every thought, every feeling seemed bound up in the one aim of self-preservation. My only hope lay in the red light; now, apparently, some four hundred yards distant. And still the water rose higher, and the ripple grew stronger, till I felt the chaise undulate, and knew that my poor brute could not keep his legs two minutes longer. My course was taken upon the instant. I knew that both he and I must now swim for our lives; so I took out my pocket-knife, deliberately pulled off my boots, coat, and waistcoat, jumped into the water, cut the horse free, and struck out in the direction of the beacon.

"I was but a poor swimmer at that time, and the current was setting dead against me. Still I kept my head to the red light, made what progress I could, and, though I felt the tide growing stronger every moment, made my mind up to fight it out doggedly to the last. A long time seemed to go by thus; I could not tell how long, for my thoughts, somehow, became confused. Then the water roared about my ears, and the red light came and went before my eyes, and I felt, with a despair beyond all words, that my strength was going! Then came a terrible moment when the beacon disappeared, as if swallowed up suddenly in the darkness — then something huge, black, shapeless, loomed up all at once before me, like a rock, and, fainting as I was, I knew it was a ship, and felt that in another moment I should be sucked under her bows! I shall never forget the horror of the next three or four seconds. I shall never forget how I tried to shout

for help — how my hands glided over the wet hull — how, summoning all my strength for a last effort, I uttered one despairing shriek, felt the waves close over my head, and knew that I was going to the bottom!

"When I recovered consciousness, I found myself lying before a stove in a warm cabin, with a bottle of brandy to my lips, and a crowd of kind faces round me. I soon learnt that I was on board the guard-ship at the mouth of the Aire, a good two miles from land on any side. The sailor on watch had heard my drowning cry, jumped overboard as easily as a Newfoundland dog, and saved me as I rose the second time. I was very ill and exhausted, as you may suppose, and thankful to lie quietly in a hammock all that night, and a greater part of the Christmas-day that followed; and I can tell you that I shared those poor sailors' onion soup and salt beef with more thankfulness than I ever felt at the finest Christmas dinner to which it was my lot to be invited."

"And what about the soldier, sir?" asked the schoolmaster, after the first excitement had subsided, and the stranger had relapsed into silence.

"Ay — what about that black villain François?" echoed the parish clerk.

"I don't know," replied the stranger, abruptly. "I never cared no ask. Either he knew that he was sending me to my death, or he mistook the lights. God forbid that I should accuse an innocent man of wilful murder. Error or no error, however, he cost

me a good chaise and a valuable horse, neither of which did I ever see or hear of again. And now, gentlemen, I'll thank you for another glass of punch."

CHAPTER XIV.

A RAILWAY PANIC.

If this were played upon a stage, now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction. — *Twelfth Night.*

"Do you think I look like a madman?"

I was falling into a train of pleasant thought when these words, uttered in a clear, steady voice by my opposite neighbour, fell upon my ear. I started and looked him in the face. He was a small, sallow, intelligent-looking man, muffled from head to foot in a superb Spanish cloak lined with sables. His tone of voice was perfectly composed and matter-of-fact.

"Indeed, sir," I replied, with some surprise, "no such idea occurred to me."

"But I *am* mad, though!" he retorted, in the same quiet, confidential way.

I was in no humour for levity just then, and, as this was evidently an attempt at practical joking, I made a brief reply to that effect, and looked out of the window. It was an express train, going at the rate of fifty miles an hour; every moment bore me

farther from one who was inexpressibly dear to me; and I felt that I never wished for silence and solitude more than at that moment. The worst of it was that, if this man had made up his mind to talk, I could not help hearing him; and there was no one else for him to address, since we were alone together in the carriage.

"Yes," he continued, "I really am mad. I have just escaped; just escaped — not an hour ago. Shall I tell you how I did it?"

I continued to look out at the landscape flying past, and feigned not to hear him.

"I was not always mad. Oh, dear, no! I do not exactly remember now what it was that drove me to it, but I think it was something connected with Lord Palmerston and the ace of clubs. No — yes — oh, yes; the ace of clubs had certainly something to do with it. However, that is of no consequence now. I had a fine house, and gardens, and horses, and servants, and a wife — aha! such a pretty, gentle, loving little wife! And I loved her, too — nobody knows how I loved her — only I wanted to murder her. I loved her so that I wanted to murder her! Wasn't that a rare joke, eh?"

I began by this time to feel seriously uncomfortable. It was getting slowly dusk, and my companion's face, composed as it was, wore an odd expression that I did not quite like.

"Pray, sir," I said, with affected carelessness, "let us change the subject. If you insist on con-

versing with me, we may as well choose a more agreeable theme."

"Agreeable! Could anything be more agreeable? Well, I will continue. It was a long time before they found it out; I hid it so well. But I knew it well enough; for I used to see faces everywhere, in the furniture — up in the trees — in the bushes; and I knew they could not really be there, and that I was mad at last. For I had always expected it. Ay, ever since I was a boy at school! Somehow they did find it out, though, in spite of all my caution — and I was so cautious — so cautious! They found it out; and, one day, two men came and seized me in my garden — my own garden! and took me to the mad-house! Oh! it was a dreary place that mad-house! They shut me up by myself in a bare, cold room, with never a fire to warm me, though it was bitter winter. The windows were barred across with iron, through which the daylight shone as if through the ribs of a skeleton; and every night — would you believe it? — every night there came a fearful shape and sat there, mocking and mowing at me in the moonbeams. That was a hell, indeed! One night, when I could bear it no longer, I rushed upon the shape and fought and struggled with it, and dashed it up against the hard walls — and then the keepers came and tore me from it, and bound me down with cords upon my bed. I heard them say to one another that I had tried to destroy myself; but I knew better. It was the shape I struggled with —

it was the shape I tried to kill! Only they could not see it. Yet there it still sat, mocking, mocking, mocking, all the long night through; and they watching in my room, and yet so blind that they could not perceive it! I do not know how long this fury of mine lasted; but I think it must have been a weary time. At length, I woke one night from a troubled sleep, and lo! the shape was gone! Ah, then I wept for joy that I was free from it; and I was proud, very proud, for it was gone, and I had conquered it at last! Well, time went on, and I resolved I would escape. How do you suppose I went to work? Why, I pretended to be cured of my madness. Every day the doctor came to see me. But not me alone; I could hear him going to every room all along the corridor; so I knew when he was coming, long before he got to my door. I must deceive him, I knew, as well as everybody else. Oh, it was a hard task; but I did it! The worst of my madness was that I could not help thinking of the oddest things; and when I talked, my tongue would utter them. However, I schooled myself to talk to him. I practised speaking in a calm, low voice — I studied what I should say — I accustomed myself to rise and bow, as if he were entering the room. I did not speak much, but what I said was reasonable — I knew it was reasonable. I used to say that I felt better; that I was tired of the confinement; that I hoped shortly to be permitted to return home; and sometimes (that *was* a clever thought!) I asked anxiously after my

wife. One day she came to see me. You cannot think what an effort her visit cost me. She looked so pale, and timid, and pretty that day — and I forced myself to sit down by her; to say to her all the things I had learnt to say to the doctor; to take her hand in mine; and oh, I longed to kill her so the whole time! But I did not. Ah, no! I even kissed her cheek at parting, though I could have yelled aloud for rage as I bent over her. I don't know whether they still suspected me; but I was not released, for all my pains. So I determined to be ill. I knew the doctor would find me out if I only pretended; therefore, I starved myself. Ha! ha! wasn't that fine? This is how I did it. Every day, instead of eating the food they brought me, I put half of it under a loose board in the floor, and half I left, saying that I felt ill and could eat no more. Each day I left more and more, so that it should seem as if my appetite grew constantly worse. And then I got ill — only I did eat just a morsel now and then to keep me from dying. I suffered fearfully, but still I played my part out, and met the doctor's eye with one as quiet as his own. At last he said that I must be removed to another part of the house, and that I required air, or I should never recover. And then did I not laugh, even though I was so ill, to think how I had outwitted him! My new room was pleasant, and looked over a garden. At the end of the garden was a railway. By this railway, I made up my mind to escape. Aha! what joy to be flying along

behind that engine — flying away, away, and never stopping! I knew well that I must have money to do this. Money! Where, and how could I get money? You will see presently! I did not mean to die, you know, so I ate more now, and got better. It is not every one, let me tell you, that is brave enough to endure starvation as I did. Madmen are no cowards! Well, they used to let me walk in the garden after awhile, but with the keeper always beside me. By-and-by, the doctor began to speak of my release as of a thing that might be in time — and then — then, although the end for which I had been working was almost within my grasp, I felt an irresistible impulse compelling me to escape, and not to wait for their tame deliverance. Day and night, I waited and watched to do it.

"The opportunity came soon. One morning when I was walking with the keeper in the garden, who should come out but the doctor, and what should he do — the senseless fool! — but order the keeper to go in, saying that he would walk with me this time!

"Oh, how my heart leaped and danced within me when he said it! But I kept very still — very still and calm — listening to the man's footsteps on the gravel walk till he was quite gone. I have told you that the railway crossed the bottom of the garden. Well, towards this spot I went (carelessly, as if by accident, you know), and he with me.

"'This beautiful day will do us all good, Mr. B——,' he said to me, in his smooth, deceitful voice.

"He was walking with his hands in his pockets, chinking the gold coins as he went — that gold that I so needed!

"'I hope that you may soon enjoy the summer on your own estates,' he continued.

"He looked so sleek and self-confident and smiling as he spoke then, that I hated him more than ever.

"I did not dare to trust my voice in answer, or suffer my eyes to dwell on him. Could he but have seen *them* for an instant, he would have read my purpose. Just then we reached the extremity of the garden, and stood looking down from the high bank upon the level tram-lines below. There was nothing but a low hedge between us and the road. In an instant I turned upon him.

"'Die!' I shrieked. 'Die! I *am* mad — I *am* mad — and I have sworn to do it!'

"I had the strength of ten in my arms. I closed with him, and dashed his skull against the tree-trunk by which we were standing. Oh, it was a glorious vengeance! I beat the smooth smile out of his face till his own children would not have known him, and then I stamped and danced upon him, and laughed aloud! Suddenly I heard the distant whistle of the train at the village station.

There was not a moment to be lost! I tore the watch from his pocket, and I took the purse with the gold! and then, ha! ha! ha! I flung the body over upon the lines, and the train came swiftly on and on, and crushed him as he lay! Was not that a revenge, and would any but a madman have thought of it? Tell me that! Tell me that!"

I was so frozen with horror that I sat as if petrified, and could not utter a word.

"Now you want to know how I came here," continued the maniac more quietly, after a momentary pause. "Well, he had this cloak on before the struggle. I wrapped it round me, and went straight through the gardens, and out of the gate, past his very lodge-keeper; and, thanks to the high collar, none of them knew me — for we were much of a height, the doctor and I. Once out of sight of the house — the dreary, cruel house! — I seemed as if I had wings upon my feet, I fled away so fast. The people in the streets of the town stared at me; but what did that matter? I did not care for their staring. I mingled with the crowd at the station and paid my fare like the rest, with — ha! ha! — with the doctor's money! But there was blood on the gold. I tried to rub it off, but I could not. It came again as fast as I removed it, and I thought they would see it when I put the money down. They did not, though; and here I am free — free! Now, answer me, do you believe that I'm a madman?"

He put his face quite close to mine as he said this, and his voice passed from its former level tone to a quick, harsh, exulting calibre that thrilled me with dismay. It was now almost dark, too, and his eyes shone with a cold, unnatural lustre like the phosphorescent light which is thrown off from fish in a state of putrefaction. It was clear that I must make some reply. Even while I hesitated, he repeated the question, and this time more impatiently.

"Well, yes," I said at last, with quivering lips; "I — I think you must be mad."

"I'll prove it to you," he whispered, bending still closer to me. "How do you think I'll prove it now?"

I shook my head.

"I cannot tell," I said, faintly.

"By murdering you as I murdered him! What! did you think I would let you live, after having told you all about it? Live to betray me, and take me back to the . . . No, no! madmen are brave — madmen are cunning — madmen are strong!"

I saw that force could avail me nothing here. In great emergencies I always retain my presence of mind. This time it did not fail me, and I was cool in an instant.

"Stop," I said calmly, fixing my eyes full upon him. "You have not yet told me all. If you are determined to have my life, it is only fair that you should finish your story first."

"That's true," said the madman, with some appearance of curiosity. "What have I left out?"

"You have not explained to me about Lord Palmerston and the ace of clubs."

"I didn't think you'd care to hear that," said he, doubtfully.

"I'd rather hear that than all the rest."

The lamp now cast a sickly glare through the carriage; and it was so dark that nothing of the country was visible beyond the windows. I knew we must be within a short distance of the London terminus. If I could only divert his attention for a little while longer, I was saved! I determined to keep him in conversation if possible.

"Lord Palmerston began it, you must know," he continued, "and the ace of clubs finished it."

"Did you know Lord Palmerston?" I asked.

He looked at me vacantly, as if he did not comprehend my question. I repeated it.

"Know him? I bred and trained him!"

"Oh! indeed?" I said. "Pray proceed."

"I bred and trained him on my own estates. I was as fond of him as I could have been of a child — ay, and fonder too; for if I had had a child, I must have wrung its neck — I feel I must!"

Here he fixed his eyes on me again, and his fingers worked nervously together, as if longing to be at my throat.

"But about Lord Palmerston?" said I.

His face resumed the old expression, and a gloomy shade seemed to pass over it.

"Ah!" said he, moodily, "that was a dreadful disappointment, wasn't it?"

"You have not told me yet," I said. "Did his lordship treat you ill?"

"He lost! he lost! I had backed him with half my fortune, and he lost! But, hark you!" and he clutched me by the arm as he said it, "he was drugged — I know he was drugged the night before!"

"Then Lord Palmerston was a horse!" I exclaimed.

"Of course he was. I told you so at first. You don't pay attention — you're not interested."

"Indeed, I am — deeply," I replied, eagerly. "Pray, go on."

We *must* be in now before five minutes were past — this I was assured of. Five minutes! — long enough to die!

"That is all," replied he, with a suspicious stare. "He lost, and I lost. That's the end of it."

"But what has this to do with the ace of clubs?"

"The ace of clubs!" said he, fiercely. "What's that to you?"

"You promised to tell me, you know; and I should like to hear it," I replied, in a conciliating

tone. "You have not told me half yet. Do tell me about the ace of clubs."

"I was desperate, you see," said the maniac. "I was desperate after Palmerston knocked up. I had always avoided play till then, but somehow I fell into it when I saw the men at the club playing night after night, winning and losing — winning and losing! I often saw as much gold change hands on a single card as would have covered all my losses on the turf; and then I could not resist it."

"So you played too?"

"So I played too. For a whole week I won incessantly. Aha! the red gold and the rustling notes that I took home every night for that week! I won more, three times more, than I had lost by the race! And then came the turn of the luck."

"You lost?"

"All that I had gained, in one night! But I was not satisfied: I went on again the next day, and lost, and lost, and lost, till everything I had on earth was gone. Nay, all I had on earth was not enough to pay it! But I know how it was. That old man I played with was the Fiend. I knew he was the Fiend. I saw it in his eyes."

He paused.

The whistle of the guard rang shrilly through the air, and the pace of the train slackened. He listened — he knew that we were coming in — he turned suddenly towards me.

"But what about the ace of clubs?" I urged, hurriedly. "Did the old man turn it up?"

"Will you betray me if I tell you?"

"Never," I said, earnestly.

"Listen, then. I hid it in my sleeve; for I was desperate. I staked thousands on the chance of cutting it. They all stood round, betting how it would turn up; the old man — curse him! — smiled, and let me do it. But he had seen me — he had seen me! And when I cut the ace of clubs, he stood up and called me 'Thief!'"

A bright flash of light streamed in at the windows — the train stopped. Thank God! we were arrived! The madman shrunk back at the sight of the lamps, and the crowd of faces beyond. I leaned over the door, and with fingers that refused to do their work, felt eagerly for the handle.

"What is the matter? What is this?" he said, timidly.

"Help!" I shrieked, springing out upon the platform among the tide of passengers. "Help! this man is mad!"

There were two men standing by the barrier anxiously scrutinizing each face as it passed by. They both turned as I spoke, and one came to me.

"Where is he, sir?" said he, respectfully. "We're waiting for him. It's been telegraphed along the line that he's murdered some one down at H—, and he's awful dangerous."

He had ventured out by this time, and was standing irresolutely beside the carriage door, not knowing where to turn.

As for me, I could only point to him, for the power of speech was gone; and just as they had captured him, I fell senseless to the ground.

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